

The Cenacle

24th Anniversary Issue
Number 107 - April 2019



—Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 1969.

April 13, 2019
10:13 p.m.
On board of forward-
to-Downtown Crossing
Redline (T)

Welcome to the 24th
anniversary issue of
The Cenacle!

Began, well along a day & evening
of work on this issue, its many
texts & images. It amazes me more
than a little to arrive to this
occasion every April, coinciding as it
always does with my birthday.
Not there yet, but in a few years
I'll have been publishing this journal
for half my life.

I didn't know as a young man
that the rejection letters I re-
ceived for my writings would lead
me eventually to this publi-
cation. Couldn't imagine that I
would eventually have the Tools
to make something like this.

-5-

10:25 p.m.
Down Downtown
Crossing to Oak Grove
Orangevine (P)

The tools or the people, each crucial to what The Cenacle has become over time. How I think of them is that the former serve the latter, like good architecture for the structure our contributors' works reside in. In turn, the high quality of the works make this structure one worth visiting.

What I knew back then was that I would write whether anyone chose to publish my work or not. Before the Internet, one's options were very limited. It allows us to send this publication around the world, & every so often this strange food brings back a new contributor to our door. This is true of pretty much every contributor in this issue.

-6-

To be able to house my own work in this journal's structure, to not worry about approval or disapproval coming in the mail, means I can focus on doing the best work I am able, with no limitations set by others.

In turn, I offer others room here too, & the supportive environment that should be part of every literary journal, but isn't always. Many let the casual friends of the day dictate to whom they send out those rejection letters, or now perhaps emails.

You are reading my words, here at an unknown-to-me length of time & distance. You may know this publication well, casually, or these might be the first lines you are reading, after the epigraph of course.

I'm talking to you. Turn the page.

-7-

10:46p.m.
Oak Grove Station
bench
Zombietown, Mass.

- If you write, if you take pictures, if you draw, if you do something creative that can be represented on pages, & if you have received your own rejections in some form over the years, write to me at the email or postal address on this issue's Table of Contents page.

If you are unsure your work belongs here, read this issue end to end to get an answer.

And even if you decide this is not the structure for your works to live within, go find another. There are countless numbers. I found my way from those top-40 rejection letters in my mailbox. 24 years of this journal shows my path. You can find yours too. Begin now. You are worth the effort.  4/13/2019



Edited by Raymond Souland Jr. 

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2019

Feedback on Cenacle 106 | December 2018

From Ace Boggess:

The writing of Tamara Miles always seems to captivate me. This time, it's "Accessory After the Fact," which left me mesmerized, contemplating possibilities. How it plays on murder mysteries and twelve-step meetings creates a perfect metaphor for how it feels to look back with regret. Even better are the things left unsaid, thereby leaving the reader with much to consider, as the poem becomes both universal and particular to everyone who takes its journey.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

I see in Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *Notes from New England: 36 Love Epistles to What Happy Remains* the world of my friend and co-conspirator at a literary life, with his electronic gadgets mixed in with his sex and Saturday book bags.

What's in his head is what's in mine: a deep empathy with the hurts and longings of others, and a love for what is green and lush, aesthetic and magick. I use his spelling of magick because, really, isn't it far better? Our houses full of books—so much the same but he lives near the sea, and I spend some mornings and midnights longing for the sea, which isn't mine and may never be near me.

Then again, there's the "Mystery of Hope" and, as he says: "We want to progress, grow, shine, share, love, tend, heal." Thank the gods. Thank you, Raymond. I will meet you at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston someday.

And, oh, how I am caught up in Gregory Kelly's poem "<<yer blue pale>>" —

*...yer bramble
collector yer flower
basket yer refuge
to fallen pine cones*

(how can this say love so well, yet it does, and especially to a little girl in my photo, once me, who holds her own little red bucket, her pail. I am near weeping from my belly with the ache and tenderness of it)—

*... and in yer charity
you run the tide
from the pinnacle
of its climb*

(how can I say I wish so much that Gregory was my lifelong friend somehow because somehow he knows me)—

*... you are summoned by the moon
sprint haste with youthful hope
to keep the pool from drying*

(my mouth is dry but not with dread but the weight of emotion, pulled as I am always by the moon, and how does he know?)—

*the win may not be yers
but the fight the toil the
exhaustion the passion and joy
the strong willed persevering love*

(I can't go farther, it's too much at once, my heart is squeezed and rent and plucked and tended to at once).

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

Nathan D. Horowitz's descent into the psychedelic world in "Eyes of Glass Dogs" has an eerie tension to it. The waiting for the unreality to overcome you, every detail vivid, like watching your own murder—but it's just a bug on a log—a leaf on the ground—the pot of boiling yagé. Details of normalcy before the tigers roam the corridors of your brain. Like waiting to parachute out of a plane.

* * * * *

From Nathan D Horowitz:

Our resident Virgil guiding us through various Hells-on-Earth, Charlie Beyer, brings us this time to the Rocky Mountains and the Central American jungle in “The Crocodile King of Belize.” I’m not sure, but I think Charlie is just getting started here, and there will be more to this engaging S.-Clay-Wilsonian, Hunter-S.-Thompsonian tale of weed-addicted giant rats, skinny black pirates, white boy grifters, Mayan pedophiles, and Jewish chicks with cocaine on their nipples.

In “Voice from the Gray,” Tom Sheehan gives us a powerful, sculpted poem about confronting one’s self, one’s memories, and one’s parents, as the earth drives up new growth in the spring. Each line explodes with tense imagery.

In another excerpt from *Same Moon Shining*, Tamara Miles continues the archeology of her family, sifting through data and documents. A haunting line echoes—a quotation from a teenage thief in a reform school—“I know nothing of my own parents,” Tamara muses. “Reading the personal testimonies of the boys at the Industrial School for Boys in Kansas has reminded me that they are, after all, mostly little boys who have had a rocky start in life.” This insight illuminates Tamara’s own people, including a grandfather she never met, who was often in trouble with the law, and who, in turn, was not around to raise his own son.

In “Dolls,” Martina Newberry tells of an ungainly girl-then-woman named Sadie, who prays for her life to go better, without much success. The tale is told in clean, careful strokes of language; most beautiful (to me) are the lines where Sadie describes what she heard back when she prayed:

*the throaty voice of the moon,
the soft slither of ivy journeying
up the trunk of a palm tree.*

* * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

I so loved Colin James’ poems in this issue. I read them several times and am especially moved by the way the opening lines of each poem draw the reader in immediately. I also got lost in Nathan Horowitz’s “The Eyes of Glass Dogs.” The imagery, the excellent dialogue held me absolutely captive.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

What fun Colin James’ “Misophonia” is! I was immediately taken in by the title, and the poem unfolds according to some ethereal principle on whose nature I cannot quite put my finger. First of all, it’s a good story. Secondly, it is colored vividly. And thirdly—what a punch line! To be rewarded with laughter after a period of rapt enjoyment isn’t so bad. Cheers, Mr. James!

* * * * *

From Kassi Soulard:

Diana Rosen writes poetry in such an evocative way that I found myself being transported somewhere new each time. In “Bus Stop Story,” she describes the scene in such great detail that I can easily picture the bus stop and the people standing with her when things go wrong, from the questioner’s “shiny bald pate” to the sound of another man’s epileptic seizure. We are right there with them and, like the narrator, I wouldn’t be able to “shake the sound / or the feel of his grip on me.”

In “Tell Me Where You Swam as a Child,” I can smell the chlorine and hear everyone cheering in the stands, right until she generously allows another to “have the only win in her life.” The last stanza is a sudden turn, but we’re right there with her, feeling the “squishy mud slick” of the lake, and then the exhilaration of rushing down the River Verde, “this eureka of danger.” Thank you, Diana!

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

Those *Utah Sun Tunnels* photographs by Jimmy Heffernan saved and continue to save my sanity. I know there's a larger force in operation. I know that this moment is not even a blink of the eye in the larger scope of things. My sanity looks again at them, & remembers again that someone with vision has offered a way through. Thank you. Words help, but the photos in this issue are first aid!

Here in Israel, we've been through intensive attacks on our communities and a disappointing election. These photos help heal!

* * * * *





Books That Rocked Us at Some Point in Our Younger Days

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Nathan on Jan 25, 2019 at 5:12pm

Dhalgren (1975) by Samuel Delany. Big thick science fiction book. I randomly picked it up in the Santa Fe Public Library in the summer when I was 14. “To wound the autumnal city,” it begins—an incomplete sentence. It’s nighttime, a confused guy with memory loss tramping across some landscape, missing one of his sandals, meets a woman. He makes love to her and she turns into a tree. He enters a weirdly post-apocalyptic city and lets a male engineer have his way with him, fantasizing about the woman who turned into the tree. It goes on from there.

The city has no government or police. Gangs called Scorpions provide a certain kind of order. Nicknamed Kid, the guy joins them. The scorpions wear chains of mirrors that throw holograms around them, so three Scorpions walking along might look like, for example, a dragon, a gorilla, and a cheetah. Kid starts keeping a journal and writing poetry. He is armed with a weapon he has found called an orchid—it straps around the wrist and encloses the hand in a kind of flower of curved brass blades. His book of poetry will be called *Brass Orchids*.

He ends up in a three-way with a woman and a teenage boy. Very kinky stuff, but also very beautifully written, with a straightforward realism that balances out the fact that there are two moons in the night sky, buildings burn but are not consumed, and you can go into a store and loot food off the shelves and find the same food there the next day. Here are some good quotes from it:

“The poems . . . are moments when I had the intensity to see, and the energy to build, some careful analog that completed the seeing. . . . All I have been left is the exhausting habit of trying to tack up the slack in my life with words.”

“Clouds out of control decoct anticipation. What use can any of us have for two moons? The miracle of order has run out and I am left in an unmiraculous city where anything may happen.”

“The problem isn’t to learn to love humanity, but to learn to love those members of it who happen to be at hand.”

“Babes, I am so bored here that I don’t think, since I’ve come, I’ve ever been more than three minutes away from some really astonishing act of violence.”

What books rocked your world at some point in the past? Can you feed us some quotations from them?

* * *

Post by KD on Jan 26, 2019 at 1:29pm

What a fun topic! Thanks, Nathan. First of all, *Dhalgren* sounds fascinating, and I'm sure it was quite the experience to stumble upon that at 14!

I'm going to think about this more to come up with a better answer, but I have two books that occur to me right off the top of my head:

*We Were the Mulvaney*s by Joyce Carol Oates: This is an epic of a novel, and I think I read it when I was . . . maybe 12? It's about a big family in rural upstate New York, spanning from the 1950s to the early '90s, and basically chronicles the downfall of what seemed to be an all-American family over this time. Despite my love of re-reading old favorites, I have yet to do that with this one.

This one just grabbed me from the get-go and didn't let go, and prompted me over the years to go back and read almost all of her early books and some of her more recent ones (which have been way more hit-or-miss for me). I remember this one being twisty, going back and forth between characters and time, and I really liked that. The characters were all . . . quirky, which I of course loved.

Here are a few quotes from it:

"In a family, what isn't spoken is what you listen for. But the noise of a family is to drown it out."

"I believe in uttering the truth, even if it hurts. Particularly if it hurts."

"Memory blurs, that's the point. If memory didn't blur you wouldn't have the fool's courage to do things again, again, again that tear you apart."

2. Well, this one has a bit of a catch. I can't remember the title or author—this has become a years-long effort for Raymond and me, every time we go into a bookstore, we check out the fantasy section to see if I happen to recognize the cover (ha!). Here's the story of the search—

When I was maybe 8 or 9, I read a very fun fantasy book which, at that point, wasn't really a genre I had read much of. Here's all that I remember of it: the cover looked like all Tor-style books, with the scripty title, and an illustrated picture (of something). And pretty much the only thing I remember about the book itself is that it contained a really, really funny pun about a clock and/or time.

Yep, not much to go on. We've kind of narrowed down that it *might* be one of the *Xanth* novels by Piers Anthony, but I don't think back then I'd have just randomly pick up a book in a long series that wasn't the first, and we're sure that it isn't the first *Xanth* book.

But this really started me off reading more fantasy/sci-fi, so it definitely rocked my world enough to change what I was reading.

* * *

Post by Nathan on Jan 27, 2019 at 7:38pm

Oates is one of the modern masters in the field. Can't remember what I read by her, but it gripped me. Piers Anthony's *Xanth* novels are wonderful, delightful. They kept me company in junior high. Everyone has some quirky magic talent. Sane, cheerful stories. It's funny to have been moved by a book you no longer recall.

It reminds me of that sensation—do you get it too?—where you can remember the sound of a phrase, its intonation, but not the phrase itself.

A pun with time or a clock? *Hmmm*. I'll keep an eye out.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Jan 28, 2019 at 10:30am

Dhalgren sounds awesome, Nate! I've heard Delaney's name often, but never tried. That should end soon.

Yes, Kassi's mysterious book we ever search for. Last year, we talked for ours to her kin on our annual visit to them out in Colorado. Some theories discussed . . .

J.D. Salinger rocked my world early on, his stories as much as the more famous novel *Catcher in the Rye*. Here's the opening of "For Esme—With Love and Squalor"—just brilliant:

"Just recently, by airmail, I received an invitation to a wedding that will take place in England on April 18th. It happens to be a wedding I'd give a lot to be able to get to, and when the invitation first arrived, I thought it might just be possible for me to make the trip abroad, by plane, expenses be hanged. However, I've since discussed the matter rather extensively with my wife, a breathtakingly levelheaded girl, and we've decided against it—for one thing, I'd completely forgotten that my mother-in-law is looking forward to spending the last two weeks in April with us. I really don't get to see Mother Grencher terribly often, and she's not getting any younger. She's fifty-eight. (As she'd be the first to admit.)

"All the same, though, wherever I happen to be I don't think I'm the type that doesn't even lift a finger to prevent a wedding from flatting. Accordingly, I've gone ahead and jotted down a few revealing notes on the bride as I knew her almost six years ago. If my notes should cause the groom, whom I haven't met, an uneasy moment or two, so much the better. Nobody's aiming to please, here. More, really, to edify, to instruct."

* * *

Post by Nathan on Feb 5, 2019 at 8:59pm

Been reading a Harry Potter book to my daughter and also *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The second one rocked my life when I was 12. Now it feels very slow-paced and uneventful. Like the audiovisual arts, literature may have increased its tempo in the last decades. Thoughts?

* * *

Post by Raymond on Feb 7, 2019 at 9:49am

I don't think literature as a whole changes, Nate, in the sense that certain kinds of books actually go away. There are still long long tomes, dense and slow to read. And quickie hits, fun for a train ride. And all the gradations otherwise.

That said, the way an individual reads may be affected. Maybe you read more slowly at 12. Maybe you had fewer big and little and clashing thoughts going around in your mind. Maybe being at a computer and phone and being deep in the ways language occurs online has affected your consciousness. Maybe, because you have years and years of life between then and now, your travels, your many experiences, what seemed huge and mysterious then is more familiar now, more one among many.

I find that when I am hooked into a book deep, which does not happen as often as once, I feel what I used to feel. The excitement, the curiosity. It's still there to be enjoyed if I reach for it. But, on the other hand, if I read something familiar from when I was young, It might not seem the huge thing it was then.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Eight

*"Why are we here?
Because we're here
Roll the bones
Why does it happen?
Because it happens
Roll the bones"*

—Rush, "Roll the Bones," 1991.

And Again

And again, some way among will, whim, & wish, there's remembrance. Sometimes clearing the way on is first, & then clearing the way back. *Remember old, thus remember new . . .*

Oh, OK, wow, I must have leaned too close to the black-&-white television set on its little purple stool. I am sitting on our green couch watching *Trip Town* with, I slowly realize, my lover & our friends the Creatures.

Then I turn & look down that hallway, following something, a shadow on the wall, following into that occasional room. A man's head with blue strands of hair.

Flick my Bic & there revealed is the ancient Gate-Keeper of **RemoteLand**, or so he looks. My very favorite film, freakiest of the freaky. Has a Gate-Keeper, not a director.

Crouched, rocking back & forth, he starts talking slowly & obscurely to a place just over my head about being from Raleigh, North Carolina, slowly, obscurely, saying: *I'm tryin' to will my trips to be more like my dreams & my dreams to be more like my trips. You know what I'm sayin', brotha'?*

Sometimes I'll be battin' a Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips! I'll throw the Frisbee from my trips, & I'll catch it in my dreams, & then I'll throw the Frisbee from my dreams & catch it in my trips!

And sometimes I'll use this pilla' that seems to follow me around, this yellow pilla' dressed in a purple cloak. Sometimes I'll use the pilla' to bat the Frisbee back & forth between my dreams & my trips. & that's pretty good. That's pretty good, don't you say, brotha'? Don't you say? You from Raleigh, North Carolina too? They got the four-&-twenty blue hills o' Heaven there, I'll aver they do.

And I look at him & say, *No, man, I'm not from Raleigh, North Carolina. But why don't you stay*

around here for a while? Here, you can sleep in this empty room here. I'll get you a pillow.

No, man, I've got my pilla'.

*How about a nice warm blanket for you to curl up in, Mr. Freaky **RemoteLand** Gate-Keeper? I've got this beautiful brown Bear Blanket right here. Will watch over you all the night long.*

Alright, alright, alright, sounds good, brotha', sounds good. Sounds good, brotha', sounds good. You go back to watching your old black-&-white TV with your lover & your friends. You ever watch that old show about Mulronie the Space Pirate. Loved that one!

Anyway, I'm sure y'all have had enough of my noise for a while.

I'm like, Yeah, I guess so. Turn back to the TV . . .

* * * * *

Starts Out As a Checkerboard

Starts out as a checkerboard. Now that seems simple enough. Checkers. Straight ahead. But then, I suppose, not even checkers are straight ahead because you do have to move diagonally, & that makes it so that you aren't quite moving straight ahead exactly.

Hmm. And it's an empty place that this checkerboard is in. Except then it's not so empty, it's tangly & vast, *goodness*, well, OK. It's like a world rises up from that checkerboard design, up from the bare ground of that place that used to be empty & now it's not, it's tangly & vast.

And the checkerboard fades in time, over the centuries, & eventually it's forgotten, that this place began as a checkerboard in an empty place.

Then one day, in a later century, there's a young orange-mustached shaggy haired young man who has snuck into this room, & he's looking at the blood-soaked carpet in an otherwise neat room.

What kind of room? Let's say it's a hotel room. Let's say it's in a tall, tall hotel. Called the Hotel Noah. Locally, called the No-Tell, for obvious & more obscure reasons.

It's hard to see the top of this strange No-Tell, as though maybe it was one thing & another before it was a hotel, & there's some vague kind of continuity going on still.

So it's a neat hotel room except for the blood that is soaked into the carpet.

In the closet, there are plenty of shirts & jackets hung up, arranged neatly. And the young man who has snuck into the room, he tries on one shirt from the many. It's orange, shaggy, like his hair & his mustache. It's open-collared, very soft, *hmmms?*

He puts it on, crosses the hall to the office of possibly the killers of the man who owned all these things. The father of this young man.

The killers in the room across the hall don't know who he is, & he doesn't know that he was in his late father's room. Nobody knows anything about anything. He's just there for a job, man, he's just there for a job.

Oh, & they're looking for someone to do a job, they are, & they like his orange shirt, makes them think of someone else but they can't quite think of who.

I'm down the hall from all this, I've been watching all this unfold. I know they're killers, I know they killed his late father. I know he's wearing his late father's orange shirt. These killers have been following me, or I have been following them, it changes over time. Time travel is not linear.

In any event, one way or the other, I can't seem to get away from them, no matter how far I go, always ends up like this.

And they've killed me too, time & again, yet it all goes on. Now what does that mean?

I just want to escape &, since no one's in that room of the late father, I go in & I crawl down real low, & I look myself deep into the blood-soaked carpet.

I think to myself, *if ever there was a moment, it would be this one in which I could look into this blood-soaked carpet, deep deep into it, deep deep, & see that checkerboard from long ago.*

And I do. I look deep into the blood-soaked carpet, I look down into its molecules, its cellulars, its atoms, its eves.

I see something. I see my face across time. Me & not me. I exist multiply across space & time. Time is not linear.

And I think, no, *this is not just me, this is others, many others, who exist multiply through space & time, throughout all of history & if that's possible, maybe history could be changed, deaths could be averted.*

I don't have to be murdered again. I can talk to my selves back then & hereon, and we can warn each other about what's to come, maybe not just us, maybe not just our little story. Maybe it's possible to exist like communicating beacons across time, & warn of peril, how it goes, well or bad.

And, as I think to myself, *wow, I wish I had enough time to do this*, there's a loud noise. I fall into blackness again.

* * * * *

I'm Sitting in This Room, Deep in My Mind

And again I'm sitting in this room, deep in my mind, where I've sat forever. It's an empty room of all but me, yet not quite. Bear with me here. It is & it is not more of the same old shite. And I'm sitting here, cross-legged on the floor in this room.

I'm looking down at a little note I scribbled right onto the floor, I used an old crayon I found, & I kind of mooshed it up in my hand a little, & I wrote with my finger: *There are those who exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Some discovered a way at a far end of history to travel back through the Dreaming, to their earlier iterations, with their later knowledge of historical peril, to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.*

There's a man, he is an Architect, this is what he did. He traveled, iterated, back through time, only he did more. He cuts the ties with his future, before the potion wears off that would have pulled him back through the Dreaming to where he had started.

He comes to find the Princess, who is from a far-off world called Emandia. She's special. She trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness for moments with all of her iterations. He comes to find her as maybe the only way to avert the disastrous end of the world. Comes to love her as he had never loved before. Learns that what you love will warp your path.

Now what is it that could be really done about this disastrous end to come? You've got those who iterate in time & space, & then you've got this special Princess who can co-exist in awareness. And you've got the Architect & his faith that the Princess could avert the disastrous end of the world. Him & his love-warped path. What could really be done?

*Well, what you could do is you adjust history, over & over & over again, until the far end is good. What's good? That's hard. **You have to turn on all the lights at once**, is what he says to her. **Find a way for human history to not end in disaster. You have to turn on all the lights at once.***

I write all this with my crayoned-up finger on the floor of this room that is empty of all but me, & yet not quite. Bear with me. It is & isn't more of the same old shite.

And so I think to myself, *what could be better than this room that is & isn't full of me, full of the same & not same old shite, you bearing with me?*

What could be better is if there was music, because if there was music, there would be hope. I'd stand. I'd begin to dance. I'd begin to move my large, clumsy body around &, maybe for a moment, it would still be large but not clumsy anymore.

It'd begin to flow back & forth, around & around, & maybe I'd begin to think, *there's more to all this than anyone can know. Now looks bad, the future does too, but maybe the Architect & the Princess & the Dreamers can save the world.*

* * * * *

Last Letter from Hue

Before that, I used to spend a lot of time in alleys, & this one time I found this little package, rain-worn, old & tired, but bound together by strings. I untied & unfolded it.

It said: *Last Letter from Hue*. I opened it up & began to read its contents. Here are some of them:

There's a stump in the White Woods, filled with rainwater, no matter the weather, & if you lean over it on your knees, & you look in, you will see your reflection first, then a memory, then something else to take with you.

He & I went together as last hope.

There were some materials that were blurred out, crossed out, redacted, maybe just mud & time got to them. But here's more:

& in the far future, the lady has led the refugees for many a year when she meets the retired football tight end. A strange ultra-violent version of football has come back into the world, whatever field & ball around. Always begins with the players jumping & shouting, "Plays for keeps! Plays for keeps!"

He begins to travel with them, the lady & her refugees, & talk of his old playing days, & show how he's survived with his tight end skills. He shows how he can climb, run, catch, block. He says these are amazingly useful skills.

Blur blur blur blur blur blur

It was like & unlike a hotel room, they said. But too many walls, too much ceiling, not enough floor. There were a lot of people inside, & one was my shaggy haired friend Antonio, who's an athlete, he likes to race, but I think he's a poet too. I was never sure. He was always carrying around sheaves of papers. Hard to tell what he was writing on them, if anything at all. Well, just once I sneaked a peek at one of his papers, & it read over & over down the page: There is no higher and there is no ground, we kiss, across the abyss, and you are mine once more.

And then there's his brother, Toanio, who had a haircut, no longer shaggy like his brother, & I could see it was a recent haircut because there was hair all over this sort of hotel room. And I want to know them all better. What else is there to do nowadays? Be like one of those killers?

Blur blur blur blur blur blur

Then some lines that just seem to go *click-click noise-noise cackle-cackle* to my touch. Then speak:

Then there are those that exist multiply in space & time throughout history. Others discover at the far end of history the means to travel back through the Dreaming to try to alter the disastrous end of the world.

This is what the Architect does, only he does more, he cuts the ties with his future. He cannot be pulled back when the potion wears off. He comes to find the Princess who is Emandian & special & trebles in time, meaning she's able to co-exist in awareness in moments with all of her iterations. The Creatures can iterate more than one in a single place & time as well as multiply through history.

*What is the goal & purpose here? **Turn on all the lights at once.** Find a way for history not to end in disaster.*

~~Blur blur blur blur blur blur~~

By now you know that these materials have appeared elsewhere & elsewhere, & I've copied them out because those elsewheres & elsewhere are gone, & if you're reading this letter you are close to gone too. Or maybe this is all you have left, & you're hoping this letter doesn't end soon because you know you are sitting in an alley, & there isn't much out there for you. Read on a little bit more here, my dear & fine friend.

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They Say There are Two Types of People in This World

They say there are two types of people in this world. The least people & the most people. And there is a book only the least people see. Called *Aftermath*, by Cosmic Early. If you saw it, it would tell you a whole lot about many things.

I don't have a real copy of it, I'm not one of the least people, but I have a pirate copy with a lot of redacted lines. But there are occasionally a few lines in a row where I can get a little something out of it.

For example, I learned that there's a deserted planet called Sunderground. It's been used to test weapons for hundreds of years. And I suppose that would be OK, but I read on later in the book, a bit more redacted, but I think I can suss it out, that there came to be some doubt at some point: *What if there were beings that lived there on that thought-to-be-deserted-planet, & they came to believe that the gods were punishing them & destroying them through these seemingly random explosions?*

So the space program goes back hundreds of years, my friends, it's obvious from these lines in *Aftermath*, even if it's a pirate copy.

In the appendices & dream fragments in back, there's less redaction. It's as though the appendices & dream fragments are not as important. It's as though if you don't know what the main text is, it doesn't matter if you read the appendices & dream fragments in the back.

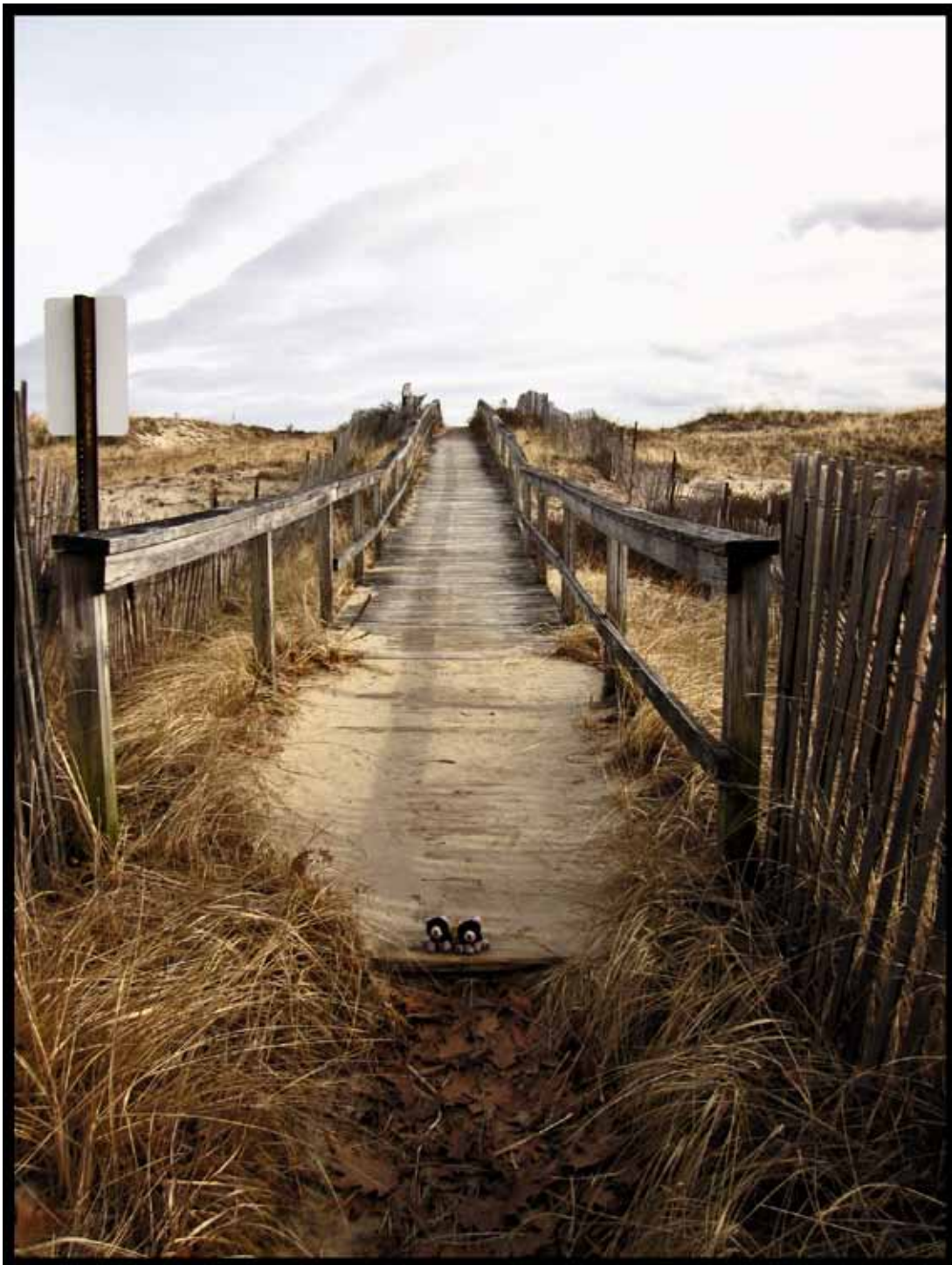
And so I get to read most of these appendices & dream fragments, often not knowing what they refer to. Here's one. Judge for yourselves:

Joe the Biscuit lives in a sealed abandoned well, & runs cords to electricity, & has a small strange old computer for wi-fi. Joe the Biscuit writes stories about obscure figures like himself, but they find love & they find admiration, because that's what he feels for them. He writes about low-level government officials, retired football players, extras on TV shows.

It ends there. *What do you think? What can you possibly think?*

I dig deeper in the appendices & dream fragments. I begin to wonder how long they are, count the pages, & start to realize that they're pretty long. But really not much redaction is going on. I read again, & there is this fragment from the field:

It was a huge house, with a huge basement. There was going to be a party that night. The fantasylands had been distributed on the shelves of the basement, separated into rows, & it's like they were deconstructed from fantasylands into just long rows of quiet & subdued individuals. Perhaps they'll be released after the party concludes. The Creatures watch from cracks in the walls, waiting, small but brave, to release their many friends.



If only we had a clean version of *Aftermath*!

But still I don't know if I believe that there are just two types of people in the world. And I don't know if this book is true. But here's one more from the appendices & dream fragments for you to chew on:

*You know, it's like this lady once said to me. I was at this party in Elliptical City & a lot of diplomats & spies were hanging out there. She & I were talking about the War. She was dressed in some kind of weird holy woman costume, like some kind of priestess. And I said, **do you think the War could finally be ended with all these diplomats & spies & everybody?** And she says to me, just flat out like it was her best wise wisdom on the matter, she says: **gotta evolve, you know?***

* * * * *

So I'm at This Diner, Late Night

So I'm at this diner, late night. Red Dog Diner, it's called. Oh, it's about 2 or 3 in the morning, maybe toward 3, because I think the drunken hour has come & gone. Only the remains remain, as it were. The overnight truck drivers, the homeless, random people who come up from the street, like me, & I'm there a lot, on the overnight.

There isn't really anywhere else to go in this town. I've been here for a few months, & it's strange how I ended up here. What happened was it was a job that sent me here.

I met some people. I must admit I was probably a little high when I met them. I think they were on the street of the city I was in, & I'd been again to that strange movie that plays after midnight at the Nada Theatre. I think it's called **RemoteLand**, though it never says on the screen.

It had left me shaken & smiling both, like always, & suddenly I was walking down the street, *hmmming* the movie theme by James McGunn, & then I was talking to these people, & they were saying *we'd like to send you to this little town for a while, if you're looking for work.*

And so I said, *how did you know I was looking for work?*

And they said, well, they didn't really say anything. They just kind of eyeballed my clothes, & my ragged book bag, & my ragged shoes. And so I nodded & said, *OK, yeah, I'm looking for work.*

So what I had to do was to go to this town & get a room & start talking to people about President Clusterfuck, getting their opinions. I didn't have to offer an opinion of my own but I do believe I could say whatever I wanted. But the point was to prompt other people to get to talking. And then I would need to go back to my room & keep careful records in a journal notebook they provided me, who said what.

And it seemed on the up & up in a sort of weird sketchy kind of way, but they paid me right up front, & they said there'd be more when I delivered them the journal records at the end of the assignment. They gave me a whole box of these journal books to use. On the cover, in weird loopy writing, they all read **Mulronie the Space Pirate Composition Book!**

So there I am at the Red Dog, because I liked it, they had the nice key lime pie, very nice, & so I'd just start conversations, I'd just lead in. I'd say, *You know, **the thing I hate about that motherfucking President Clusterfuck, the worst thing about him is, he flat-out lied about his intentions, more than anyone else. He said he'd help those in need & he's done intentionally the opposite.***

And I look around at them all, because these are the people he'd promised to help—the poor, the hardworking, people who felt like they'd been forgotten. ***Doesn't give a shit,*** I'd say.

Now they knew I read poetry books, & that I wrote things down on little scraps of paper. So they figured I was a college boy & didn't hold it against me the foul language. They'd get to talking, too. They had opinions on the matter.

The waitress, she must have been real pretty in her day, even if her day was about 40 years ago,

she said, *you know, if that ugly old motherfucker grabbed my private personals, I'd give him a what-for & he wouldn't forget me either.*

And the truck driver man, grizzled & looked kind of flashy in the eyes, charm about him that didn't quite equate, he'd say, *I'd like to keep that guy with me in the truck on my overnight hauls, when the radio would go out. I'd listen to this guy boast & brag about his conquests, & people he'd screwed over, & all the deals he'd done. And I really couldn't guarantee that before the end of the haul I wouldn't just shove the mothertrucker out the door because I was bored of him & sick of his old crap.*

There was another guy amongst us who was from the west side of outer space, & he was a real super nice guy. He had a spaceship on the roof of the Red Dog, but he said it was invisible so we shouldn't go looking for it. He told us this story.

He said, *there was a time, I was traveling with this dwindling number of refugees led by this woman, & she had a scale by which she cast our group's fate & fortune. We were all refugees of one kind or another. People who had escaped prison, lost their homes to invasion, heretics who believed Emandia is real. We were on one of the far moons, where the atmosphere is failing & things weren't going too well. So she would cast our group's fate & fortune, like what we should do, how fast we should travel, to the mountains, the forests, or the Sea.*

She'd put these little stones from the sack on one of the scales, & on the other she'd put this mix of seeds & other things. And she'd study & weigh & measure, & consult her shiny little books she wouldn't show anyone, & this would help her to understand how we should go.

But it just seemed like things were just going worse & worse, & people would just disappear in the night. Our numbers kept dwindling, till finally we ended up at a cave, & the scale was long since gone, sold or forgotten, lost, something, something.

And so I'll just tell you that when I saw that spaceship at the back of that cave, beat up but still whole, & remembered that I used to be a mechanic, I took my shot. Rustled up some tools, fixed up that spaceship, & got my ass to this planet where the atmosphere isn't failing yet.

*And I'll tell you about your President. He may be a clusterfuck of a guy locally but, against the universe of clusterfucks I seen there in outer space, **he ain't shite.***

It Was Sort of a Then-Now Dream

It was a sort of then-now dream, you've had them, where you're then & now, & both & neither. It's like the years of your life are a rack of spices, & there's that soup on your hotplate, in your room without windows & words. It's a silent room, & you're silently mixing your soup with what's in your spice rack.

Each spice is a year of your life. And you can manipulate the spices in the soup a bit. You can throw in one year's town, & another year's travel, & another year's party, & another year's strange, good time you fell into. Little bit of that melancholy, little bit of that ecstasy, little bit of the White Woods, little bit of the desert, little bit of the city, little bit of the empty roads, little bit of feeling very, *very* found, & a little bit of feeling really, *really* lost.

Finally, you pour some of the soup into a bowl. Sit down on your old mattress, to sip, to feel how this soup shall be. Close your eyes, *mmm*, this sure is some tasty soup.

I see that face, smiling at me, thought I was funny. I see that crowd I was dancing in, didn't laugh at me. Join in! Shake it! That book I read for the first time, that book I read the 20th time.

Yes, my kind of soup. What's your kind of soup?

What would your rack of spices look like?
How would you mix them on in?
Where would you find yourself walking, with eyes closed, deep in your night?
What hand would be holding yours?
What face would be looking at you?
What car would you be getting into, & what house would you be arriving at?
Would it be day, would it be night, would it be dusk, sunrise?
A drinker's high noon?
A tripper's full moon?
What would the room look like?
What would the apartment look like, what would the house look like, what would the cave look like,
what would the Island look like, what would the Sea look like?
Was it a big boat or a small?
*Was it a jumbo jet where you couldn't feel nothing around you but a small **hmmm**, or a little*
propper, hopping from Island to Island, with a strange pilot in it, a charmer?

Sometime later I found that I wasn't in the silent room anymore, with the soup & the rack of spices. I was trying to write the story of this then-now dream with a cheese puff on the back of my lover's leather jacket.

She was holding very still. She believed as I do that you could write a story like this only with a cheese puff, only on such a leather surface. I think this moment, too, became a spice. I think these moments of cheese puff writing about Islands & boats, charming pilots, & faces, hands, big roads & small, big cities & little ones, times of ecstasy, times of powerlessness, times in between, are all spices for the rack & the soup.

Maybe every memory, even the most mundane one, has the potential to be a flake of spice, in one of your very many jars, on your very long rack.

* * * * *

In the Enemy Military Camp

In the enemy military camp, I was trying to leave quietly with some others. Some of us are invisible. We walk in a group, not sure where the exit is, to this very large building. *Is it really a building? Is it a spaceship? From the west side of outer space? Or in a mine of some kind, deep under the earth? What is it? What can it be?*

The invisible ones go ahead, but soon I feel like I've lost track of them. And I look around & I realize there's no one else here either, visible or invisible. *Did they make it to the brick wall through time & space?*

And now & now & now, I look around, & I realize that I'm homeless. I've been homeless for quite some time, & I feel like my head comes & goes to other places sometimes like that factory-mine-spaceship place.

Often I find myself moving through dark & silent city streets, pushing a shopping cart, very afraid because nobody's around. Sometimes I stop for a moment & I try to remember something, something worse than this that'll comfort me.

Usually I remember that time I was in that situation with a very strange old man with a gun who took us all hostage. We were in a hospital, the emergency room. There was a movie on the television, I remember. Had no title. I was vaguely watching it before he started waving the gun around.

It was late. I was waiting to find out how someone was, someone I hardly knew but I had met

while escaping from the spaceship-factory-mine. He got hurt, stumbled over a broken brick wall. Now this strange old man's holding a gun to everyone. Crying out, spitty & toothless, *This is just another in the Panoply of Occurrences & Events!* Kept saying it every so often, like it's all what he had left, but his gun too.

Hours pass. Later on he's starts to doze. I sneak up to him & kind of slip the gun out of his hand. Then I rush it over to the orderlies who apparently didn't know the emergency room waiting room was being held hostage. I slide the gun down the hallway to them, & kind of waved at them to *come & do something*.

They just take the gun & seemed to file it away in a closet. That seemed to satisfy them that they'd done what they had to do.

I shake my head. Oh yes, this empty city street now, yes. *This* is better than *that*, *this* is better than *that*, by far.

So that's what you got to do, if you find yourself homeless, or in a vast spaceship, or being held hostage by an old man in an emergency room. You got to close your eyes, & take a deep breath, & take another, & then think to yourself, *it's been worse. Let me think on that for a moment & then come back to all this*.

* * * * *

I Was DJ'ing My Radio Show Remotely

It happened this one time when it seemed to me like I was DJ'ing my radio show remotely, from a different room, or another station, down the road a ways. The connection was not really good. I knew my show was crackling, arriving in pieces to whatever what's listening.

And I worried about that some, but I kept on, & I explained to the listeners, what scraps of 'em was left, I says: *this is my last show for a while now because I'm going be traveling with an outer space priestess & a magician & a musician & a couple, close, but they don't belong to one another anymore. So I'll just see y'all's again*.

We take off for the west side of outer space &, on those long nights far out there, we get bored, just looking at the stars speeding on by. Everyone's finished the five *Mulronie the Space Pirate* books, more than once. Well, naturally, we get to telling stories about where we come from.

So I told this story about the time I was at a party in Elliptical City & it became violent. I don't know why, just did, was in the nature of that party on that night, & I think only the couple of us escaped. My shaggy-bearded friend & me. We had to crawl over bodies. *What kinda party was this?* We just kept going.

Eventually this turned funny & somewhat dream-like, as though there had maybe never been a party. *Was there really a party tonight?* I don't know, seems to me like we're just walking along this beautiful night, & nothing bad's going on at all, nothing at all.

That was the last time I saw that friend. Somewhere toward morning we became parted, & I went home for a while. Later I heard on the radio, not the radio show I was doing, but someone else's radio show, that there was this party in Elliptical City, & a lot of spies & diplomats at it were killed. *Let me get to my outer space travels*, I think.

And now the outer space priestess looks at me & says, *is there a moral to that story, young traveling DJ?*

And I says, ma'am, *it's the moral of every good story. Make sure, in every uncertain situation, to get while the getting's good*.

* * * * *

I'm in a Road Race

Now if it seems like I'm huffin' & a-puffin' a little bit tonight, it's because I'm just in from a road race, cross-country, kind of like that cartoon with the bird & the Beast. I'm racing among many other racers that I used to know.

There grew up over time a special group of close competitors & good friends. We probably did the things you'd expect. Sharing wine, women, sneaker tips. All those bonding-type things.

Now they're just *polite* to me. It's like I've gone away & come back casually, & they're not interested in casual. Well, who is? *Who is interested in casual?*

So there's a particular friend from our group I remember most fondly from the old days. I helped her out with her romances, of the female nature, kept them under my lid. *Those* kind of times. And I want to reach out to her. Feel again that close friendship that she & I had. Maybe she can help the others feel me again too.

So we all gather in town the night before the race, to celebrate our friendship & love of racing, at this diner, the Red Dog, it's *our* diner. None of the other racers come here like this. And there's a long table set out just for us, & a kind of ceremony we perform. But I don't remember its complex details so well.

Cups of wine, all different kinds of cups, shapes & sizes. *Sip, pass on, sip, pass on.* But I get confused by all this. It's like there's more to it than just *sip, pass on*. There's like a second level to it that I get confused by, & I start spilling my cups & apologizing. They all start explaining at once what's supposed to happen, but I don't understand them because they're using terminology I've never heard of.

Why can't these racers just be my friends for one more night? Why can't we just race through a series of towns until dawn & then part each other good, *can't we just part each other good?*

They start showing videos, from all their hometowns, big gatherings of families & mayors & talent shows. *Who are all these people?*

I don't know. I don't know, but finally my friend shows up, & she smiles at me like she knows me always. And I say, *bring me somewhere, my old friend.* She smiles, raises her finger to me, & gives me the old *come along with me* gesture,

We slip out into the night, & I meet her fellow racer, as slinky as she is.

Let's go, sisters. Tonight, & tomorrow too, let's blow those old bastards straight back to hell.

* * * * *

There's an Octopus

My beloved & I are living in a single room with a bed, & there's an octopus underneath it, no kidding. Seems scary at first, but eventually we all get used to each other a little more. There seem to be worms on the floor too, here & there, & shadows, & the octopus will sort of vibrate when it slurps some up in its tentacles. This goes on for a while, & we don't have jobs, any of us, including the octopus.

Door's open, but all of us are too stubborn to leave. Seems like a kind of a stalemated situation.

Finally, in the middle of the night, many nights into this weird scenario, I jump off the bed, & I race for the door, & I race outside, & I'm in a driveway, standing near a van, green & gold. Sit down breathless, & a White Bunny approaches me, & hops into my lap.

Her name is MeZmer, & there are little Bears nearby too who, strange to behold, join MeZmer in my lap. These strange magickal Creatures sit with me as friends. I'm OK with this.

Years later, I'm telling this story to a colorful group of friends, most of them shaped like people. When we all get together it's potent & amazing. They tell their crazy racing stories too.

The more that show up, the more likely it is that there's going to be a dessert cart. Somebody



almost always shows up with a dessert cart. They scour Elliptical City for the strangest, most delectable desserts to bring to this amazing group of friends.

And I tell them about living in a room with the octopus, & the worms, & the shadows, & my beloved. She is sitting there too. She has a strange rabbit's mask on, with both its silly grin & hers underneath. They all love this story, & they ask me to tell it again, so I do, & I change it up a little bit to keep them interested.

Someone brings me a very odd dessert. They say, *look, it's shaped like an octopus!*

I say, *I can't eat this!* And they understand, & don't try bringing me any shaped like Bunnys or Bears either.

Then someone turns on the baseball game on the TV. Sometimes we watch it late into the night, smoking & eating desserts. The announcers say, *this game wasn't officially scheduled but here it is happening, & it's now into extra innings & we've run out of pitchers!* Some of us are laughing, others have fallen asleep.

One of the announcers, an old jock himself, gets asked to play. Seems he used to be a pretty good pitcher. So he smiles & nods & goes out there, but they don't have a uniform big enough to fit him.

So he just pitches in his street clothes, takes off his tie at least, & the umpires don't like it, think this is very odd. Good thing this game wasn't officially scheduled. By the time it's over, everybody's asleep, all the desserts are gone, & I dream of that room. That octopus, my beloved sleeping with me, with that strangely grinning rabbit mask, & her silly grin underneath.

* * * * *

I'm Alone, in Elliptical City

I'm alone, in Elliptical City, looking at a kind of 3D map of a planned heist, working against a rough draft I have. My favoritest special Elliptical City deli-made peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich is nearby. I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box. I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

And someone tries to nab it, & I yell them away. Everyone knows Mondays between 10 and 11 are when the truck passes through the neighborhood & is vulnerable to be hit. It's a messy kind of sandwich, no straight lines. I'd like to think it even goes down from my tongue to my tummy in an elliptical way, down an elliptical path.

So I keep planning my heist with my 3D map. It wavers before me & my hand is able to gently touch it & move it around, so I can see different aspects of the neighborhood.

I know, I know, you're wondering, *what is that sign behind me, that electric sign?* You can kind of see it better, as I bend down to pick up & take another *delicious* bite of my special Elliptical City deli-made sandwich.

It's an electric sign that says, *If You Like Orchids, Booze, & Acid*, & there's an image of the Imp in the Full Moon. Does she blink on & off, or does she kind of waver in between on & off? Is she part of the electrical sign or just cackling within its light? I'm not really sure.

You know the thing about special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches is that they don't last long enough.

And then I remember this morning how I got up & was so full of energy for this heist. I was thinking about how three of my dreams had been arguing.

One was a store-like planet, on the west side of outer space naturally, where only the workers lived. People visiting the store-like planet could only stay three days in a row at most, had to shop & go, everything on this planet was for sale.

One of the other dreams said, *yeah? I got you beat by a country mile. Listen to this one.* This dream waves large leathery hands around, bloodshot eyes, a mean but hurt look, couple of snaggly teeth. *I'm in a large room, he says, with many others, lots of tables, people. It's kind of a college registration day & I don't know what I'm doing there, look at me, I ain't no college boy.*

But I'm filling in my forms & I'm filling them in with lies. Pretending that I'm a teacher in order to get financial aid.

*And I come to a line in this endless form, & I hate these forms, they're long & long & long, & I come to a place in this form where it says, **tell about your life closely, but in an elliptical way.** I don't know what to do, man, I don't know.*

*So I just write in this space why I'm here. I write, I'm sending my people up to Elliptical City to a party to kill her, once my lover & partner, now my enemy. No mercy, I instruct, **none.** Space priestess, musician, dreamer, wears a belt that is the source of all of her power. I fill in my application, and turn it in to a guy that's got three eyes, one of which is blackened from who knows what. I walk out.*

Well, that dream sat back, like he was all self-satisfied.

And the third dream just looked at both of them, & *hmmmmmm'd.*

Here comes the truck, brand name Ellipses, green & gold, here it comes, *here it comes.* I'm gonna heist it, *I'm gonna heist it.*

*Oh wait a minute! Hey, man, you took my special deli-made Elliptical City peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! I just had one last bite, no, no man! I'm trying to heist this truck but I can't let go of the last bite of this delicious peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich! Hey man, hey man! Come back here, hey man, come back here! That's my sandwich! I'll kick your ass, motherfucker, **I'll kick your ass!***

* * * * *

In a Place Beyond the Dreaming

Sunk down deep in a place beyond the Dreaming, like deep, deep in the Wide Wide Sea. It's dark but not silent. I hear something low, it's like a *hmmmmmm*. I find I can think, I find I can remember, forward, backwards, even sideways to other branches of how things might be or might have been.

Some years from now, I'm living in the big beautiful Elliptical City. I'm going back to work at a bookstore I'd worked at years & years ago. But I delay. One boot on & one boot off, pants half zipped. Don't know where my glasses are & I think, *I've gotta go, expenses don't pay for themselves.*

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Open my eyes, I'm even less ready now. Well, that wasn't good.

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Well, now I'm just in bed with my beloved & the alarm is going off.

Close my eyes, *breathe, relax.* Feel brung back into the *hmmmmmm* of the Wide Wide Sea. Try again.

Up! Up! Up! Sitting in a chair, familiar chair, kinda rickety but comfy, sitting amongst Creatures. White Bunny, Bears, many others. *There's a microphone, oh goodness!* I'm talking into this microphone right now! *How did that happen?*

And it's daytime! Why, it's about Saturday, 11 AM, years ago, years on, & at this moment, oh yes, it's time to DJ this radio show. *I made it back from the west side of outer space.*

Thank you, Wide Wide Sea, for sending me back to where I am right now. Helping me to see how fine it is.

* * * * *

Is It Friday or Saturday?

Half woke, wondering if it was Friday or Saturday? I don't know what day it was. I don't know where I am. I look around. Bed is too big, pillows are unfamiliar. No sign of my dear friend the yellow Pillow in her purple cloak.

Well, this is a strange place. I look out the window. Is it a hotel? This damned No-Tell again? This time it is surrounded by the Wide Wide Sea on all sides. This damned No-Tell is now on an Island that is almost exactly as big as itself. OK. *What about this?*

Well, let's see here. Maybe there'll be a boat. I scrounge around for some clothes. All I find are a pair of shorts that come down to my calves, & are a little too tight in some places & a little too loose in other places.

And they say *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!* on them, on the one side, & the other side, well, it doesn't say anything. It's like the ChocoSmax patch on one leg's cuff is sort of scraped off vigorously, as though someone just *did not want* to advertise ChocoSmax on that side.

My green plaid jacket. And some sandals. I don't wear sandals, but that's all there was. There isn't anything else in this room.

Oh, except for that little purple furry Creature that likes to dance a lot. His name is Pirth. We've been traveling together, with our missing Pillow friend too.

So I put on my green plaid jacket over my bare chest, Pirth in his usual pocket. Struggle into my overly long, overly tight, overly loose shorts that aren't that short, & the one side says *ChocoSmax: Them's the Fax!*, & the other side is scraped off. And my sandals,

I walk out into the hallway & I realize, *oh, this is one of those hallways*, & I begin to dance & dance & dance, knowing that if I don't dance I am going to fall right up. I do not want to hurt me, but I especially do not want to hurt that little Pirth in my pocket.

So I make my way to the sort-of escalator, & it is going in the right direction, even though the sign says *Up! Up! Up!* I ride to the ground floor. There are a lot of people there, though I don't recognize any of them. They look at me with rather hostile stares, as though this is all my fault. I wander along the narrow beach, wishing for a boat, so I could just leave right now.

I think to myself, *Boy! I know the one boat I could use now, if only, if only, if only.*

And then it comes, the beloved Boat Wagon of many the tale & story. Small, but I know how to deal with this. I just walk toward it, & I get smaller as I walk toward it, & it gets bigger. We arrive each other the perfect size to fit. Now Pirth is standing next to me, as we are the same size.

We climb into the back seat of the Boat Wagon, with our friends the Kittees & Friend Fish at the wheel up front. Buckle in good. *Safety First!*

And suddenly all those hostile people start running toward us. *Hey you! Hey you!* they yell, waving their arms at us.

But we *paddle paddle paddle, paddle paddle, paddle paddle* away!

* * * * *

I Was Listening to this Guy Tell a Story . . . to Nobody

I was listening to this guy tell a story to nobody at the far back of the Greyhound bus. Traveling a long way. It was one of those trips where it starts later in the evening, & the bus doesn't stop for hours on end, & it gets very quiet as it travels down the highway. Going fast but, inside the bus, it seems as though time almost stops.

Most people sleep. I like to read in those late hours. Sometimes my reading light is the only thing that's going in the bus, but this night a guy was talking, quietly, he was in the back seat. I was in the second to back seat. There wasn't anybody else really that far back, as it was a half full bus. Most

people were sitting near the front, probably to get off as quick as possible when the ride was done.

Anyway, I can't say I heard the whole story but I heard scraps of it. He seemed to be talking about a group of people he called close friends. He said they'd gather together at a private party at a diner, & there was a lot of wine & some kind of, I don't know, special dessert or something. It sounded like a weirder party the longer he talked.

There seemed to be no gravity at this party, they turned it off, & the only light was what glowed from the floor. And there was a girl he liked, amongst this group of friends, but she was just crazy, he said. He said it over & over again, *she was just crazy, she was just crazy, she was just crazy.*

But he liked her. She'd tell him which of her girlfriends would lick it right, do it slow, make it fun, make it last, enjoy themselves, & which ones were checking off the box. *I'd take the ones who passed my test down into that old spaceship buried under Chief Seattle's. Our bodies felt like whole worlds smashing down there.*

Then someone at the party put on some of the kind of music you could dance to when there's no gravity in the room, & the only light is the vaguely glowing floor, so you have to be able to move around with all parts of you. You don't have your feet to guide the rest of you so much.

He said, *I'd been trying to get a hold of her for months, but she would only talk to me at a distance, at a far distance. And here she was in this room! So I sort of eased my gravity-less way over to her, & hoped she recognized me, & she seemed to but, then again, she seemed to recognize everybody. That's why I liked her.*

It's not exactly dancing when there's no gravity. It's more like smiling nearness, & I want to say something to her, but I take off my shirt instead.

That catches her eye. I'm scrawny, there's not much to see. Got a few bruises & a couple unintentional tattoos, one from that The Pink Floyd show at that desert fest.

But then I took off my jeans. I was going through a time where I didn't wear underwear, so now I was naked.

And then she did recognize me, & she smiled, & she sorta swam over to hold my two hands. She looked into my eyes, & I could see that there were about a hundred thousand souls inside her. They were all dancing too. And they were all naked.

What more is love than this?

* * * * *

There's a Camp Out, I Think

There's a camp out, I think, in those weird White Woods behind the Red Dog Diner. Some years hence, with some dear friends. We're all very *very highhighhigh*. At one point we've all gathered in a circle around a small someone that's glowing, dancing, sentient, purple, furry, & there & not quite there, & we all see him. And we relax by his glow, & people start to tell stories, from the backwhen & the hereon. You can do that nowadays. You can look further down the road or you can look back. And there are many roads, if you will.

I say, years ago, before any of us were born, they shot a spaceship into the moon. Now I was watching it on a hotel TV, in a strange room that seemed to have more than the usual number of walls & ceilings & floors. Lots of rooms in the No-Tell were weird in one way or another.

It was a party, kinda like this, but kinda not. And they weren't very highhighhigh like us, no. It was some kind of the old cheap shit they had. I don't know if I knew anybody there, but someone shouted, hey! They're shootin' a spaceship into the moon! It's happening right now!

And I remember sitting in a corner with a can of some of the cheap shit, & there were these two girls dancing nearby, & at first they were dancing close, like lovers, some kind of old style of dancing. And then they started jumping up & down as the spaceship got closer and closer to the moon. And they started sorta jumping into each other, slamming their chests together, & yelling out *moon*

boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies! moon boobies!

Another friend I hadn't seen in years, he'd stopped racing with us, he's smiling at me new & telling more of the story. *Well, I was at this deli. Not far from that hotel you & your Moon Boobie girls were staying at. I knew all about that rocket ship they said was gonna hit the moon. I didn't believe a word of it. That's all done with wires & smoke & mirrors & shite &, anyway, what did I care about such things?*

I had a book in my hand, called *Aftermath* by Cosmic Early. It was a good book & it was the kind of book that well, once you get to reading it, shooting rockets at a moon, *whatever*.

And so, what happened to me, while that was happening to you, was that I came down this alley with my book, & my special Elliptical City deli-made peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwich, & I thought, you know, hell with you all, I've got no offense meant to any of you, but hell with you all.

I just sat in this alley with my book & sandwich, way down the alley, where nobody could see me. I had a candle, & I sat reading my good book & eating my sandwich.

I just thought, you know, I'd like to shoot myself whole & full into this book & land on it. Anybody come down here, all they'd find was a book with a smile on its face.

* * * * *

I Think I Heard This Story on the Radio One Night

I think I heard this story on the radio one night. It was one of those AM stations that doesn't come in too well very often. I guess I was living in an alley at the time. Not all the time, I want you to know, but sometimes.

And I had an AM transistor radio, & there was a Radio Shack nearby. They threw out batteries that weren't even dead in their dumpsters, so I had plenty of batteries for my AM transistor radio.

So I was trolling up & down the AM dial. I had a good antennae on this radio, & they might have thrown that out of the Radio Shack too, but let's just not go into the details of that. I found this station at the very bottom of the AM dial where the more obscure stations reside, sometimes briefly, & the DJ was telling this story. His voice kept changing, coming in & out, like in scraps. I don't know if it was the signal or just his voice itself.

He kept saying, *there was a young man, a football player, & his story is thus: in his travels, he had 7-8-9-10 sexual encounters over the course of a period of time, with 10-9-8-10 different situations.*

And so of course there's fallout from all of it. One travel the DJ told of was when the young man wandered unknowingly into the enemy alien camp. *This camp of aliens, they were so strange, they seemed to be some kind of a mist.*

The DJ continued: *The young man learned that there was a popular lady, popular & charitable, African-American lady, greatly admired for her social causes, & yet she is a part of this alien enemy mist. Then he learned that there was this British TV journalist who wrote pieces defending the power of the people against the powers-that-be that would exploit them, & yet he was part of the alien camp mist too.*

*There were so many others like these, enwebbed & unidentifiable, across human history, & the only clue to them we've learned of, & this is what we want to tell you in this news report, is that they look handsome or lovely or speak in noble words, kindly, sweet, progressive, but they sniff funny. Not like any other smell you've ever smelled before but, if you sniff close you'll catch it. And if you happen to be with one of them in a situation where you have cause to **hmmm**, well, they'll **hmmm** with you, but just a little bit off, a little bit off.*

* * * * *



Seems to Be a Traveling Book-Movie-Island in a Spaceship

And again, seems to be a traveling Book-Movie-Island in a spaceship that I find myself in, probably on the west side of outer space. I'm looking for copies of a literary journal I did back when there were pens & paper & books. I called it *The Cenacle*.

And I have to admit I still do that kind of thing, but they don't like it on this spaceship. I have a room. I'm actually a janitor.

I'm convinced that somewhere in this spaceship, that left the home world so long ago, there's old copies of *The Cenacle*. I've been looking for years. I've been finding copies here & there, don't know how they got so scattered. I have a nearly complete collection.

The new ones I write in my notebook. I have a lot of scraps of paper. I have a lot of pens. I have them all hidden in a room that's beyond the janitor's closet. I found it long ago. It wasn't being used for anything else, & nobody knows it's there. Who comes into the janitor's closet anyway, much less his secret room?

So eventually I arrive at Rosie O'Grady's Good Times Emporium. It's this bar someone conjured up out of photographs & memories of how it was back then on the home world. They call it a drinking saloon. Nobody's quite sure what they drank back then but it certainly looked like a fun place in those photographs, & now in our hidden replica.

People laugh a lot there, & there's some approximation of music. Sometimes it's real music, sometimes it isn't. Some records on the jukebox, that works sometimes, by The Pink Floyd & James McGunn. Sometimes we just clap hands & shout. Music seems to have traveled with us from the home world, unlike a lot of other things.

So I'm sitting in the corner & a friend of mine comes up to me. He's a tall guy, handsome face, comes up with his three dogs. He's the DJ for Radio Sunderground, the pirate station on this ship. They play it at Rosie's all the time. I used to DJ too with him on it, but my janitor duties got to be too much. *I had to find my missing issues.*

He says, *hey man, how ya doin'?* & I want to answer him but his dogs—who I've met many times—there's an old gray one, a younger black one, a third one that's kind of brown—as usual, they forget me, & begin to nose near to me, growling. It takes a while for the whole thing to settle down.

I say, *I'm still looking, as you know.*

He says, *yeah man, I'll put the word out, you know me, I'll put the word out. Us DJs gotta stick together here.*

I say, *yeah, you're a good guy, Chris, you're a good guy. I gotta get back now. Break time is up. This spaceship needs moppin', sweepin' like nobody's business.*

* * * * *

On the Movie Studio Lot, There's a Strange Yellow House

On the movie studio lot, there's a strange yellow house that nobody talks about. Or goes into. Filled with stuff of different kinds. One day, the handsome black movie star is driving by the yellow house. He's right now playing the town minister in a remake of that great old film *A Place Called Oorous*. Excited to be working with that mysterious Gate-Keeper nobody knows much about.

There's a cop across the street for some reason, & something goes wrong at that moment, at that intersection of yellow house nobody talks about, & the handsome black movie star, & the cop.

The scene shifts to the heartrending story of the underdog basketball team, having a dream season, winning more games than anyone could have imagined, going through all sorts of conflict & crisis. The kinds you would expect in a heartrending film. They play out their last game of the season at home.

We know they're not going to make the playoffs. We know they're not going to win the championship, but what a season it was! What characters, what times! That visit to the ayahuasca shaman up in the mountains, that time they rescued the miner from down deep in the earth. The tragedies, the triumphs. And they're losing that final game, although they show up relaxed, ready to play, nothing to lose. They've won it all in their hearts.

The scene shifts again, more personal this time. My family & I are living in the back room of a government office. I have in my corner my writing pad, my little phonograph, my 6 favorite LPs, my radio, several books, that's all I could take. All I was allowed to take.

I invite this girl I like over. My dad is illustrating another one of her poems, called "The Four-&-Twenty Blue Hills O' Heaven." We will put this illustration up with the others on the wall of this back room of the government office. I hear them talking on the other side of the room from me, though I can't quite hear them well. The sounds are strange in this back room.

My brother's sitting next to me in my corner, falling asleep. Our dinner of protein bars & canned goods always tires him out more than it should.

Later, maybe years, I'm in a grocery store, wondering why all the bread is behind glass doors now. It makes no sense. But I go through the trouble & the paperwork &, as I'm coming out of the store, into the neon day we all know so familiarly, the black movie actor comes up to me & says, *where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Where's the basketball, man? It didn't go into that yellow house, did it? Do I have to go into the yellow house again? Don't make me go into the yellow house, really! It was a great season, but why do I have to go back into the yellow house? Have your poems been illustrated too?*

Really? Where's the basketball where's the yellow house where's that cop why did I have to go why why why blur blur blur blur blur blur

* * * * *

I'm Sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle

I'm sitting with an Ancient Sea Turtle, on a beach somewhere deep down in the Wide Wide Sea. He's not feeling well. Sick, depressed. It's an empty beach we sit on. My hand is on his shell, softly.

He says, *Human Being, look around this beach, look at the vastness of this beach. You can't see it from end to end, Human Being. Once it was filled with other turtles. Filled with other turtles! All kinds, all colors, & all shapes. Many tongues. From other worlds, from other kinds of places than that. It was a kind of a, you might say, a cross-paths, a resting place, a place of peace, old friends discovered, fences mended, conflicts talked through, until everyone was happy & celebrating. And it may sound simple to you, Human Being, but it wasn't.*

I say, *Where I come from, back there, & I vaguely gesture, we don't have such a place. Not for everyone, not on a vast beach like this one that would so fill the mind & the eye, it would be enough for everyone to come to. An agreed-upon place of peace, where it's sought & found & left with. What happened, why are you the only one?*

I outlived them all, Human Being. What I'm telling you about happened long ago.

Would you have done anything different? I ask suddenly, still lightly touching his shell, trying to give him some comforts.

He's quiet for a long time, & I listen to the roaring of the surf of the Wide Wide Sea, the beautiful thing near us.

He says, *There wasn't anything to do.*

Are you glad of it all?

His wrinkled cragged eyes close more & more, & I think he's falling into a long sleep himself. But then he whispers, maybe from just inside his dream, *Of course.*

* * * * *

Finding a Friend, in the Country

You remember that great football player you've kept hearing about? Well, now he was in the country, having wandered away from the bus station again. It's his one way in this long trip he's taking of rebelling against the whole thing, because he's been given the travel tickets, & the list of places to stay, & the money to spend, & the guides, but he'll just wander away once in a while, catch the next bus after that.

And, sad to say, he met another football player he'd known back in high school. In fact, they'd been real close. Curly blond fellow, looks like a wide receiver, & that's what he was. Tall, long.

He finds his friend out on this country road, farmhouses miles apart, no people to be seen. His friend's wandering a little strangely, even being out here I guess you could say is strange, far from where they come from.

What's worse, though, is his eyes are dead. Completely dead. As our hero comes closer, he sees that his friend's skin is no longer pale-pink like it was. No, he's become a Zombie.

What? What?! Our hero looks around him, kind of backs off a few feet. His friend doesn't exactly see him, but sniffs something nearby, & sort of starts to veer in the direction of our hero, who's wily enough to keep moving around a bit. And yet he doesn't know what to do.

He's seen all those TV shows & movies about Zombies. You're supposed to kill them in the head or something. But this isn't a TV show or movie. He looks around. There's rocks, there's sticks out in the gray fields that seem empty of any growing life.

He watches his friend who's sort of going *grrrrrrrrrr* & sniffing, & he thinks: *what would he want me to do if he could say?*

Finally, he leads his friend slowly, stumbingly, through those empty fields for a long, long time. Looking for something, looking for anything.

Then, by miracle of miracle, he finds it. *A cliff.* A high cliff. Our hero can't even see to the bottom.

It's not too hard to trick his old friend into tumbling off, & gone forever, but our hero pauses & pauses & pauses, & his friend sniffs & sniffs & sniffs.

Finally, our hero pats him on his Zombie shoulder & says, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye."

* * * * *

He's Sitting Out There, in the Country

He's sitting out there in the country, in an empty brown field, next to his friend who, before he perished completely, was a Zombie. He'd had to push him over a cliff earlier today & then he climbed down. It was a long hard climb. He almost plunged a few times, but he made it down. His friend was now inert & strangely light. He could lift him up & carry him on his shoulder, like an empty sack. What was there that mattered had drifted off.

So he just brought his friend along. His dead Zombie friend, empty of something important. Climbed back up that cliff, somehow, sweating & stumbling. Now they were sitting in the brown field that they'd first encountered each other. And he's saying to his friend things he'd never said to him, when they knew each other, back in high school.

He says, *I remember that time you lost that girl you loved & you said to me, **I don't want another one. I just want sex. That's it. That's the only part I like anymore.** We were smoking an orgy bong. One of yours, of course, so big you never could figure out who all those hands, titties, butt-cheeks, & things belonged to, though it was sure fun to try.*

We'd go to parties. You'd pick one out, you'd almost always leave with her, throw me a wink. I didn't think any of that was good. But I figured it was a phase, as things are.

*Then there was that time, that last time we saw each other, where you invited me out to a deli in Elliptical City. You said, **take the bus!** I said, **what bus?** You wrote down the directions to get the bus to a city I'd not heard of in an area I'd lived in all my life. And yet there was the deli, there was Elliptical City, & it was moving along, I kid ya not. It was traveling right along.*

And you & I & this girl you'd found, & there was something different again, something more relaxed. You'd stopped being the nickname you'd given yourself for a long long time there. You called yourself Captain Dick on a Stick. As we sat in that deli with the peanut butter, jelly, & cottage cheese sandwiches, & we traveled along in that strange Elliptical City, moving through the night, you held that girl's hand very lightly, & something good in you was back. It's gone now, but I'm glad it was back then.

* * * * *

The Bus Without a Roof

We're riding along on the bus with no roof. It hadn't had a roof for a while. At first this seemed like a problem, but you know people can get almost used to anything, really. And we got almost used to it. People complained still, but we got almost used to it, you see. We learned how to talk a little louder, we learned how to shade our faces to the brightness. Everybody wore hats against the hot, hot sun, so hot. And we got used to the bus without the roof, it was the only way to get from there to there. We had to, everyone on that bus, had to get from there to there.

So there it was. Us on the bus without the roof. And this old fella was boasting & boasting to me, I don't know how we got to talking, I never know such things. But he was saying how he lived in this apartment with two girls, & one of the girls took a liking to him, but they decided to keep it a secret from the other girl.

And so once in a while he'd just pull her laughing, snickering into his room, & close the door, & turn up the phonograph, & they'd have themselves some fun for a while.

But the other one knew, listened. And the two girls had been best friends & now they weren't. This had come between them.

So I said to this old fella, *Did you do something about it, did you do the right thing? Did you take the other girl into your room, if she was willing & wanting?*

He said, *Yeah, but it wasn't the same. She knew it wasn't the same, I knew it wasn't the same.*

And of course the bus passes through Elliptical City at one point, it's what they call a detour, takes several days, I'm not sure why exactly why we had to do it to get from there to there because Elliptical City is nowhere near *either* there or there, but I will say it's some pretty country down there.

And so I said, *Are you still livin' with these two girls?*

And he said, *No, no, it all went down the night I pulled both of them into my room.*

Don't tell me, let me guess. They decided they liked each other better than you, didn't they?

He looked at me shocked, like I'd exposed his most uncomfortable secret. *Yeah, what do you think?*

I thought for a moment, longer moment, gave it some good long thought, & I said, *You know, brotha', I think this goddamn bus needs a roof.*

* * * * *

Going Down a Drain

It was just a fragment, nothing more. It was about a drain, going down the drain. Just a fragment, nothing more. Once down the drain, I find myself in a class of some kind, very tall building, way up high.

My classmates are now leading me down many flights. I just about lose them, lotta people, lotta stairs, lotta flights. I get to the classroom eventually, sure, & I don't know anything in the textbook that's sitting at my desk. I truly don't recognize it. I don't even know if I know the language, & the pictures don't help either.

But next to the textbook, kinda half slid under it, is an *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*. I open it up, not sure what else to do at this moment, & I start reading an article that seems to me to be very important. The longer I read it, the more important it seems to be to me.

It's a story about preparing a *philosophical meal*, all the courses, how to arrange the table, silverware, what plates to use, what lighting, should the windows be curtained or uncurtained, should there be music in the air?

Then the dream at that moment swoops me back down, as though I'm continuing along, & I'm on a bus with no roof, though there's blankets & things, in downtown Elliptical City. Waiting for the right stop to get off & it's very windy, very windy, the bus with no roof is sort of rocking back & forth & I barely remember everything I brought with me, as I get off the bus.

I'm clutching the Bear Blanket, but barely, & I hurry into a gas station nearby because I want to see that *philosophical meal* article again, & I hope they have the *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*.

It's very crowded in this gas station, the line's out the door, & I must admit I begin to slump at a certain point, & I begin to fall asleep, until I'm nudged awake by a cop.

I end up inside eventually, & I ask the cashier for the *Elliptical City Globe*, & a Red Rutabaga Tea, & he fetches both for me as though he's a waiter. And I get outside, & I find myself a payphone, & I call my beloved at our apartment in the Back Bay, & I say, "Lover, we're making ourselves a *philosophical meal* tonight."

* * * * *

Bookstore Apartments

It was years ago, some of you might remember, there was a thing in the city called *bookstore apartments*. Oh, it wasn't a big thing, it wasn't on the TV news or on the front page of your *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*, but it was a thing for some people.

You might say they loved books so much that they just wanted to live in books. So if you knew the right guy, you could arrange it. You'd live there, you'd work there, people would come in, they'd buy books, they'd read books, they'd talk about books. It was a *bookstore apartment*, that's what it was.

And so I'm roommates with my friend & his girlfriend, but he has a second girlfriend that she doesn't know about, because he lives in more than one of these *bookstore apartments*, he's kind of a sneaky snake, you might say, And I'm the only one lucky enough, so to speak, to know about his several *bookstore apartments*. There's more than two, maybe three, possibly four.

He's an English guy, so he has that accent the girls all go for, & some of them kind of just don't pay attention to the rest because that accent is sure something else. I admit that I go for it too, I'm not saying there's not something there to go for. But I've got other troubles of my own.

I have these two other friends, they're these older ladies, & they're constantly worrying about money. They live in the same building as the *bookstore apartment* I live & work in, but they seem to be very poor, even though I don't think they are. They're always trying to figure out their taxes using bank statement cards. The whole system they have rigged up is just very dubious & somewhat incoherent, &

I'm trying to help them out.

Sometimes what we'll do is we'll all pile into their old Emperor, in the back, & they'll tell the driver to just drive them around the edges of Elliptical City, & we'll sit in the back in the comfy, cozy Emperor. That's an old, old car, built when cars were thought to be like great ocean liners on wheels. So we'll drive around, & we'll huddle together, & I'll be looking at their bank statement cards & trying to study their taxes. Wondering on occasion: *why don't rich ladies like this, even if they think they're poor, just get an accountant? Why me? I live & work in a bookstore apartment! What do I know about these things?*

Then I notice one time that the Emperor has left Elliptical City entirely, & we are driving somewhere else different from where we were. We're out in the country, lots of empty fields & we're passing some very strange billboards. They seem to move & talk &, as I look a little closer, I see, oh, there are people living in the billboards too! Well, that's some fine new technologies.

The driver, he's new, didn't know to stay in the city, he tells me, *Yes, indeedly, you can customize your billboard to exactly the kind of living style you wish to pursue*

And I say, *Well, that's pretty amazing. That kind of makes my bookstore apartment look sort of old-fashioned.*

But then he turns to me & says, & I can see that he has the long ears of a dog, & the sharp eyes of a fox, & the beak of a robin, & he says, *No sir, your bookstore apartment is just fine.*

I wonder why he talks in this funny way. I wonder what exactly he is, & I don't know.

I sit back in the comfy, cozy seats in the back of the Emperor, & the ladies swarm around me again, smelling like cookies & old perfume, & we continue to study their taxes, & I vaguely wonder when my next shift is at the bookstore apartment, & if I should pick up some ChocoSmax along the way home.

* * * * *

I Have This Friend I've Known a Long Time, In Different Ways

I have this friend that I've known a long time, in different ways, someone I feel compelled to find & lose again. *Do you have someone like that? Someone that keeps coming & going?* We both kinda agree this is how it is. Years, minutes pass.

One time, when we first knew each other, I was trying to teach him something about Creatures, these magical little beings that I know, mostly in dreams but not completely. We're sitting on the roof of a brick building, many floors above the town. We're sitting with this little White Bunny with mezmering eyes.

She's looking at me. I'm looking at him. I hand her over. Now she's looking at him. He doesn't know what to think. This is not part of things he knows, this magickal White Bunny studying him as she is, & he's hearing what she's saying though she's not speaking aloud. I don't think he ever forgot that day, though he ran from it in his mind for awhile.

We were often there on top of that brick building high above the town. It was called Candidate Jennings Apartments. Neither one of us lived there, but we ended up there a lot. Things like that happen. If you're looking for a place to smoke the joint, if you're looking for a place to kiss a girl, you end up on the top of places like Candidate Jennings Apartments.

Another time, it had been a while, but we got back together. He was now very old, much older than me. We were walking along the river & the river sparkled strangely, many colors. Now he believed in many things that he hadn't believed in before. He was hoping he could visit with my White Bunny friend again, who he hoped maybe could now be his friend too.

We eventually did. Entered the White Woods, walked deep & deeper. And he chose never to return. *I've got too much to learn*, he said as we parted. *I don't know anything yet. She will show me.*

* * * * *

It's a Story of These Modern Times

Maybe it's from tomorrow, maybe it's from just around the calendar's corner. It's become a time when the phones you carry around to communicate, or show off, or whatever it is you do with them—leaning over them over & over again, hours on end, days on end, lifetimes on end—they're now required. There's now something called Happy App.

You got to do more than just carry them around & look at them. You got to do more than just update your blog & your popularity & your pictures & how fat your ass is.

No, there's more, because you're required to download something more than pictures or audio. Once a day, you prick your finger on a little hidden spot on your phone, & something downloads right into you.

They call it, informally, Happy App. You are rushed to a happy place in your memories—if you don't have one, one has been written up for you, & you are rushed there. You're there for what seems like a long long while, though it's seconds really. It calms you. It soothes you. You're OK again. *You're OK.*

Now, on the one hand, you could say there were *The Matrix* & *Brave New World* & other predictions of such things as Happy App to shield you from the coming disastrous end of the world. *Bad things to do so*, they warned.

But if you could really look out your world's window in this time just around the calendar's corner, you would see ceaseless darkness & death & suffering & pain & loss & blackness. No going back, & no going elsewhere.

So maybe what the crazier scientists talk about as being something that happened long ago, something they call the Unitary Consciousness—you, dreams, the world, all one—maybe that's coming again. But maybe not. Until then, soon, there will be Happy App.

Oh, & if you don't take your daily little prick of Happy App, you don't get any more. And good luck to you then. You can't borrow someone else's. You can't buy it on the black market. You can't cook it up yourself.

Could there have been another way? Fingers can be pointed at the powerful, yes, but everybody else too. Everybody who let things go for just another day till our days ran out.

So then you might say those that most brung us here had to step in again to offer new answers & solutions, best they could do as the world collapses. Not much but—

Don't forget to take your Happy App today!

* * * * *

It Was an Outdoor Classroom

This happened so many years ago, & I almost think maybe it happened in some other world, some other life, to some other person. It was an outdoor classroom, I'm not sure how it came about, didn't start as a classroom, just started as a Great Tree.

This tree was so great, it filled the park it was in with its shade. Its great roots spreading out from its trunk, its great limbs looking toward the sky, the musical green & golden fruits hanging from its branches. Yet somehow, over time, those who gathered around it could not help but begin to speak to one another, neither as strangers nor as friends but something else.

It's as though those borders & boundaries of people-folks, & their fences & morals & buffers, not only had these not merely fallen away, but it's like they *were never there*, under the shade & musical fruits, branches, leaves of this Great Tree.

They all flowed round & round its trunk, such that you might have said they were become like Creatures. They now saw each other distinctly & the same. Teachers came & went too, but more often



what happened is that different ones took the lead, spoke up, began to tell.

A few years later, I was traveling with this famous documentary director to the wasted landscape of his hometown. He had an affable way about him, but his intellect was fierce, not to be underestimated. Thought to be a friend of that Gate-Keeper, so of course he was like that.

So one time we're sitting around the campfire somewhere in the dregs & ruins of his hometown. We were on top of a still-standing brick building called Candidate Jennings Apartments, roasting our tasteless food.

And I'm telling him about this Great Tree, & all its wonders, & how people were. And he's listening very intently. His small glasses practically fog up with how closely he's listening.

And he looks sharply at me & says, *There are different kinds of Great Trees in this world & others.*

I say, *What do you mean?*

He gestures around the evening view of his desolate & torn hometown. Not a flower, not a fruit, hardly a color to be seen that wasn't damaged or pretty much done.

He says to me, *This is my Great Tree. But I'd like to see yours too sometime. Now let's get some sleep. Lots of interviews to do tomorrow.*

* * * * *

It Begins in a Lunchroom

There was this weird guy—not in looks, he looked ordinary—white shirt, black tie, dark trousers, big rainbow target on his butt, just like anybody else—but he kept trying to have lunch with women.

Meaning he would sort of mosey on up to them in the lunchroom with his tray, try to sit on down with them, or her—there were both kinds of women there—& it just wasn't good because you can't do that in a lunchroom full of two types of women.

And so I got in his face & said, *Look, what's your problem, man, where you coming from? I think you need to get along.* But he points to his tray, as though that explains all, appeals his case.

On this tray, there's these tiny little paper cups of pale green mouthwash, in profusion on this tray. So he wants to share lunch with them, or her &, as a kind of *hors d'oeuvre*, offer them, or her, a tiny paper cup of pale green mouthwash.

This all makes sense in his mind, but I just kind of send him out the door & I say, *Go down the hall, go to the lunchroom with the two types of men, & offer them the mouthwash.*

The woman he had been harassing, I'm not sure which type she is, but she wants to thank me. In fact, she wants to pay me for my help, but I refuse. I give a wave & then I leave. I walk down the hall to the barroom, & I walk in, & they dump beer on me.

It happens every time. Somehow I forget, since I don't go there very often, that that's what they do every time. It's kind of a ritual. Or maybe they just do it to me, I don't really know, but they dump beer on me, & then they sit me down between these two big guys, smiling weirdly, great big moustaches. Almost like three moustaches per guy, they're so big.

And we sit down, & a long story begins to tell itself, but I never remember these stories later.

I'm sitting there soaked in beer, I don't remember the story that's being told me, I know this, I won't remember it. It takes place deep in the White Woods, there's a sense of menace, it's not a safe place, but I don't know why. Why would the White Woods be dangerous?

I'm thinking to myself, *if only I could remember this dream, maybe I could wake up from it & not have to go the barroom anymore, & get beer dumped on me every single time, & listen to the story I can never remember, & then the lunchroom.*

*But I can't remember the dream, & I can't remember the story, & I don't remember that the beer gets dumped on me, & I encounter that guy with the mouthwash every single time.
Got a key, man, out of this? Got a key?*

* * * * *

I'm Sick Today This Morning

I wake up sick today, this morning, this early AM, & it reminds me of something that happened a long time ago, when I was a boy. I lived in an apartment, next door to an old man, who I was mostly scared of, because he was old. He was quiet, & he was tall, & I wasn't. I could hear him playing guitar & singing in his apartment, & I had no talents to sing or play or really do much but want.

There was this one time when I was home sick. Everyone had gone out for a while, not really sure why. I decided I wanted some hot cocoa to feel better, & I thought I could do it myself. I could boil the water, & put the packet of hot cocoa in, & stir it, & let it cool, & it would comfort me in my sickness.

But something went wrong, with the stove, with the water. I did something wrong & I panicked that I was going to burn everything down. So what happened was I ran next door & I pounded on the old man's door saying, *Please help, please help!*

I heard music, then silence, & then movement. Then he came to the door, & he saw my face &, though I had never seen him move fast at all, he was amazingly swift. He ran in a crazy fast hobble into my apartment & he turned off the stove, & he put the water in the sink, & he showed me how to wipe everything down so there wouldn't be any stains or problems later.

Then he smiled, & he left, but awhile later he came back & he handed me a small volume. He smiled a strange old man smile at me & he said, *I want you to read this. It might comfort you while you're recuperating. Goodbye.*

He left, & I got into bed, with just the little ruby lamp for light next to me on the bed stand. I opened the little volume & read the story about the boy who blew bubbles for fun & profit.

It was a story of a boy who, when he was young, didn't sleep well. His head made noises, whistles, groans, & sounds almost like voices. He'd wake up frequently so his dreams were very strange, & sometimes words came to him that he didn't quite understand.

He didn't talk much while awake, because he was afraid of the same thing happening then but, when he was about my age, his grandfather gave him a jar of soap bubbles & said, *You try that out.*

It seemed like the old man knew what the boy was going through, because what happened was that when he blew bubbles & they popped, they would make the sounds that were in him. Groans & whistles & sounds almost like voices. *It was amazing.*

But it wasn't really until he learned he could blow bubbles with words inside them that his fortunes began to change. He began to blow word bubbles &, as he got older, he began to blow word bubbles from his dreams.

He realized that they were wise wisdoms not from him but from somewhere, & he began to do this for others, when they needed comfort as he had needed comfort.

He would blow wise wisdom dream bubbles out, & it would comfort others, & he found his way in this world, & the profit he gained was that *other* kind of profit of course.

* * * * *

Did You Ever End Up in One of Those Elevators

Did you ever end up in one of those elevators where you can get on just fine but you can only get off if you know the right sequence of numbers? And you have to know further that this sequence is of someone falling asleep?

Luckily, that day in the elevator, I was with a friend & he told me, whispering in my ear: 7-8-9-10, 10-9-8-10. Very lucky, I'd say.

So I got off the elevator & I walked into a cluttered chamber. Time doesn't pass because I'm a few strokes of paint on an old canvas in the corner of this cluttered chamber. I'm watching my future self get off that elevator, look around. He decides to pick up all the clutter. I'm watching.

Pulls up the weeds from the floor, gathers a lot of scraps of papers together, stands for the longest time looking at his old desk, not even wondering how it got here. Some things are not worth the wonder.

He begins to reassemble this chamber, though he keeps me in the corner, the old canvas of which I'm a few mere strokes. And he sits at the desk, hunched over, & he has about him an air of one who is not going to leave there for a long time.

* * * * *

Inside the Book There is a House

Inside the book, there is a house, & there's much music & noise in the house, inside the book. To escape the music & the noise inside the house, inside the book, you have to go deeper, find the inmost room. When you find the inmost room, you will wonder if is this really the party you've been wanting to go to, all these years?

The many faces are familiar. Old & familiar, recent & familiar. You see one who you like to call him the Traveling Troubadour. He just arrived, out of breath, guitar in hand, big smile on his face, blue eyes twinkling.

You think how you never know when you're going to see him these days. How it will happen, or for how long each time. You look at him smiling but serious & say, *what of the future? Is it set in stone?*

He thinks, takes a few exploratory breaths among his thoughts but, somehow, at that moment, you get separated, & you find yourself looking at a weird splotchy painting, standing next to two people that you don't know.

They're telling each other *it's a bad painting, the painter painted his shame. Look at that cluttered chamber. Look at that portrait of himself, living in a soap bubble. Just those few rude strokes, hidden in the corner of the canvas. He painted his shame!*

They look directly at you & say, *you should paint over it.*

One hands you a little jar of paint, the other hands you a kind of flat-edged knife. They say, *Paint over it!* You do, partway, but then you panic.

*Why am you doing this? They're against you now. Warning you away, laughing. **You have to find the Traveling Troubadour.** You have to ask him if it's possible he might not die in the future. Is it set in stone? Or layers of paint that can be added to, subtracted, changed?*

* * * * *

There Is a Cackling Imp In My Cereal

There is a cackling imp in my cereal I'm trying not to eat. Oh yes, the card game has spread worldwide. The big vast card game involving LSD & dreams. Me sitting in a rocking chair, an old green

rocking chair, out on the big porch looking out to the world. *And what a game is going on, high & low, many colors, constant music!*

Money? *Ha.* Not everything is peaches & cream. Not everything is cackling imps in your cereal.

When I'm not here on this big porch looking out to the world, I return back to my one room apartment, knowing I have to move. There's no choice. The building I'm living in is now part of the game. Something else is going to happen here. They're not going to tear it down but I won't be living here no more.

I have no plan, nowhere to go, no one to take me in, & the washing machine that fills half of this one room apartment, it's what I do for a living, at least until I have to leave, overflows.

I just got to go. I'm still carrying along that cereal bowl & that cackling imp is still in the cereal. I still haven't finished it, I'm not sure how this morning is going to proceed.

I couldn't sit on that porch all day. They don't let you. *Get back in the game!* they say. So I leave behind my one room apartment, realizing there was nothing there for me. Not even the washing machine was worth my time. So I just left, & I started walking. Roads aren't like they used to be. They're not straight, they don't necessarily go anywhere anymore. It's all part of the game, the worldwide card game involving LSD & dreams.

I meet this scientist along the way. She's a nice enough lady, a little ragged around the edges, a little gray, not so certain as scientists get when they're in their greatest glories.

She tells me she's in search of her science. We talk about what this might mean, but she's not sure. I ask her if she ever had a science.

She says, *I had many. The chems, the bios, the astros. But somehow they all fell away from me, or I fell away from them.*

Was it the card game? I ask her as we walk along, the road doubling & trebling. That's when she takes out a box from her lab coat, frayed, soiled. The box had all sorts of symbols on it. There were scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It was a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas. I look inside for a long time, & it shows me things I couldn't understand.

But then I blink & it's empty, but then I blink & it's full again, but then I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but then I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but I blink & it's empty, but I blink & it's full again, but I blink & it's empty—blur blur blur blur blur blur

* * * * *

Seems Like There's a Million Documents

Seems like there's a million documents laid before me all over this table. Every one needs attention, every one is confusing. I start to look at one, & it relates to another, & then I look at that 'nother, & it references one I can't find, & so I look around for the one I can't find, & I notice one that is kind of sort of the same but a different version, most of the language is the same, & then I look deeper into the whole thing, & realize that many of these documents are both the same & different, & I'm trying to figure out what that means.

They seem all related somehow, & so they connect to one thing, & what does that mean? I think, *Well, they're all paper, that's something, & I suppose they come from some tree somewhere, maybe many trees. And I lean back in my chair, it's a rickety chair, but holds me well enough, & I look around the room. It's a dim room but I can see OK.*

And I start to think, *Wow, there must be some Great Tree from which all the other trees grow, way down deep in the earth, & that Great Tree's growing now, & never ever is that beautiful Great Tree somewhere down deep at the heart of the world ever going to be chopped up & made into little scraps of paper that are incoherent & unimportant & unrelated & twisted together & sitting like these on my table.*

* * * * *

It Must Be Another **craz-z-zy** December

You know, it must be another **craz-z-zy** December, let me tell you. I have 'em all the time, once a year at least. So this time, goin' to a job, well it's a job interview, but I'm hopeful. I have my lucky socks on, & my lucky underwear on, & my lucky hat on, my lucky pinky ring on. I'm just all decked out in luck. But it is a **craz-z-zy** December, so either it's going help or who knows?

I have directions to the job interview, & it's a part of Elliptical City where I haven't been to, which is strange, because I feel like I've been to every part of the city in more ways than one. But very circuitous streets, odd buildings, they're not shaped exactly like buildings, they're more shaped liked trees, & mountains, & animals, & things.

The address on my little scrap of paper that I wrote out with my scratchy hand tells me that it's this parking garage I'm standing in front of, & this parking garage doesn't look like a regular run-of-the-mill kind of parking garage either. It's kind of oddly shaped for a parking garage, as though the vehicles that park within it are not automobile-shaped somehow.

So I go into the parking garage, & I walk & walk. It seems like miles that I'm walking in this parking garage. I do finally make it to a door at the very back of this strange parking garage & it says **Office** on it.

I walk in & there's just a desk, it's a round desk, not rectangular as you usually expect. There's an old-fashioned phone on the desk, the kind we haven't had in centuries on this planet anyway. It's one of those where you pick up the receiver & you talk into the little piece, & it's wired to the wall. I pick it up & say *hello?* & the voice on the other end is joyous!

I can't tell you any other way, it's a **craz-z-zy** December. That's when this happens every time. *Joyous!* Telling me happy things that I don't understand. I don't know the words, I don't know what he/she/it or they or them is/are saying, but it's joy, it's joy emanating from this strange telephone, & I listen & listen & I want to share in it.

I want to give it back. I want to harmonize with the joy of this strange voice on this strange telephone. I just don't know what to do so finally I just *hmmm*.

* * * * *

In the Cave of the Beast

Now this last story that is the hardest to tell straight because it has so many angles & curves, & one can only hope to try to make sense of any of them, much less all.

In the cave deep inside the Tangled Gate, one of the heroic Brothers come to save the world was listening to the Beast tell these strange wise wisdoms of the world. Let's you and I listen from where & when we are. Let's listen & try to remember.

The Beast said, in his strange growly animal-type voice:

*Life is suffering for some. The sufferers are the bricks & mortar of the climb elsewhere.
Or else we can learn the world is enough to save all.*

*We're not from here, so here's not important. It's transient.
Or it can be learned that here is gift.*

*Preserve nature, it is the privilege of the few to enjoy till moved on.
Or it is the magic to keep & perpetuate the world.*

*These ancient words were destroyed & more over time. Some now say the world is illusion,
others now found righteousness to uphold in faith over tolerance, certainly over wonder.*

The shine of some lives were built on the rags of others.

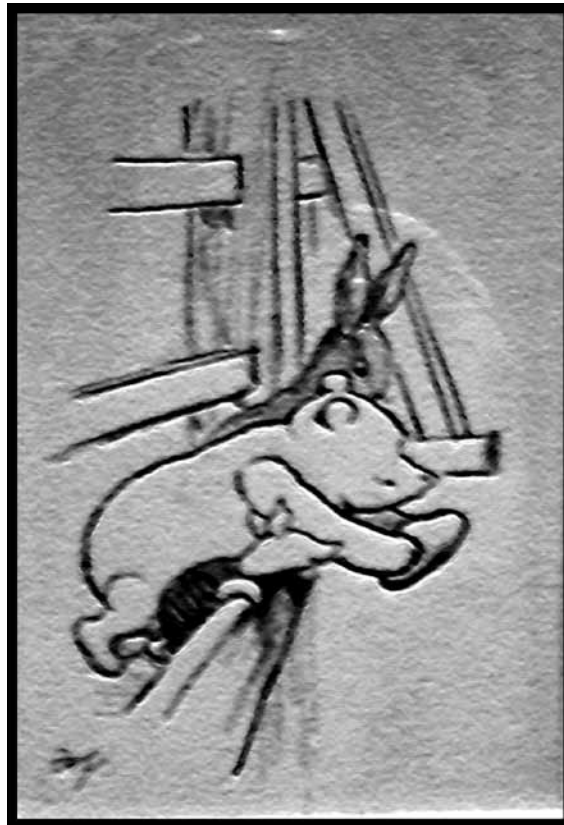
His words were said in strange ways, & over a long time, & the Brother was not the same as the man who'd walked into the cave. When he came out to the White Woods, it seemed as though it was somehow ten thousand years later than when he had walked in, even though that made no sense.

He found nearby houses that were built into the earth so that only their roofs were visible. He noticed there were round doors in the earth near them, & saw people pushing the doors open, & come climbing out of the stairs from below, & then later go climbing back in.

He was offered kindness & rest by some of these people, spent the night in one of these houses.

He had so much to think about, about the choices people make, about the world they wished to be.

4/21/2019
Milkroge, Mass.



Martina Newberry



Orphanage

The cold links of these chains you wear constrain
your memories from freely airing their complaints.

*Origins: Who is that woman
pushing poppy seed through the hand grinder?
Sad she is, incapable of sharing
such a sensuous experience.*

*Who is that man, sold early into
slavery, but sweetly surrendering
to it all his life?*

That orphanage from which you emerged—
after World War II, and after Korea,
and *I Love Lucy*, and *Soupy Sales*,
and long after childhood's life span—
where is it now, who lives there now?

You need someone new in the rawness of
this naked life. A mother, a sister,
maybe a lover, to show you that all
that is good on this earth can be had.

Come here. I'll hold you in this wilderness.

* * *

That Town

That town—
 too far from here
 (too far from there).
 Sadness and trepidation hangs over it
 like a century-old quilt. It is always late
 afternoon there, and the atmosphere
 is the color of vanilla custard,
 carries the taste of tin.

That town—
 was my bewildering beginning,
 the village of my young wifeness—
 steel mills and strikes,
 dreamed-up romances,
 dateless weekend evenings,
 eulogies over the telephone wires,
 talking of this one or that one
 who ran away or died.

That town—
 I swear to you, there were days
 when I didn't want to open my eyes—
 when waking up was an act of supreme optimism
 and warrior courage.
 The sagging porches of our best-kept secrets
 were at the front of too many houses,
 disenchantment reigned.

That town—
 I look straight ahead at the highway
 when we speed past.

I will not look at that town
 until we get to its Hallowfield Cemetery—
 where I turn my head to see the gisants
 nodding their granite heads.

* * * * *



We Are Those Guys

[Travel Journal]

Awake after bedtime listening to the bad frogs down by the river. Earlier they sounded like they were arguing. Now they're quacking nastily together.

François paid extra for his second yagé ceremony two nights ago, 80,000 sucres, \$23. He and Gus and I cooked, as I described. We boiled the brew down till it was nearly as thick as honey. Came back to the hut and prepared for the ceremony: painted our faces, hung up our hammocks. Only Gus had no hammock. He lay on the boards of our sleeping area, wrapped in a blanket.

Joaquín told me to serve myself and the others first. If the brew was good, he'd have some. I poured for myself, prayed—*Good visions, strong visions; Great Spirit, please grant me the power to heal myself and others*—and drank, then poured for François, Gus, Mark, and Dave. Back in my hammock, I worried. It was my second brew. My first had failed because a horse had trodden the cord of visions that bound it to the sky.

Mark stood and went outside and threw up. A good sign.

Joaquín helped himself to a cup. Another good sign.

François rocked forward and back in his nylon hammock making a noise like a helicopter. The kid was flying. That clinched it—the brew was working. Everyone threw up except me. I poured a second round.

I relaxed in my hammock, speculating. *What if one day I'm arrested for yagé in the States? Is yagé subversive? How could it be, if it just makes me want to be nice?*

"I don't have any enemies here," I imagined testifying in court. "The Christian right, what they do with prayers and preaching and following the word of Jesus, I think that's wonderful. I'd like to have them all over for dinner, just to hang out. Share what we've got. My mom can cook a really good cherry pie."

At the thought of that cherry pie, I burst out laughing, and find I've entered the realm of yagé. *Wiñawai*, sky people, sing through me, play me like a wind instrument. They're a network of golden lights over my head—though Joaquín will tell me the next day that he saw them above me as tiny multicolored people, each wearing four crowns.

My song goes,

*When one love is high
I can do anything.
With the wiñawai
I'm doing anything.
With a new way to fly
I can do anything.
Under the deep black sky
I'm doing anything.*

Smiling, I sing, at my leisure, relaxed between the earth and sky, ready for anything.

Gus gets up and pours himself a third cup.

"I wouldn't drink that if I were you," Dave warns, his narrow face grave, his dark eyes and his dark curls glowing under his beaded crown in the candlelight.

"Dave, I think I know what I'm doing," Gus bristles. He drains the cup and lies back down on his mat and blanket.

Twenty minutes later he turns his head and vomits on the ground, then lies still. Sits up, looks around blankly, lies back down like an angel whose wings have just been amputated.

His candle, fallen over, is burning in a pool of wax on the dirt floor. His face is near his pool of vomit.

He moans. Moans again.

He begs, "Somebody help me, please!"

The obvious one to respond, his brother Mark, is deep in visions. Reluctantly, Mark sits up in his hammock and, in a strained voice, urges, "Gus, just relax. OK? Take some deep breaths."

Gus mutters, "Achhhhhhhh, I'm in Hell! No! No!"

Mark tells him, "Gus, you're fine. Just calm down. Breathe."

"Achhhh . . ."

Mark sighs.

The wingless angel staggers to his feet, whips off his T-shirt, shorts, and underwear, and smashes into our kitchen shelves. Pots, pans, metal plates, plastic cups, silverware clatter to the ground. He bounces back, lies face down on the ground, groans.

I go over and sit down next to him and say, "Psychic Therapy Department. How can I help you?"

Gus bursts out laughing, then begins babbling and writhing on the dirt floor. Like a cross between Shakespeare's Ariel and Caliban, he appears a creature of both air and earth, flying without leaving the ground. And with Hell dispelled, what he's seeing now delights him.

"Zodiac dogs're hidin' in that mustard jar!" he drawls. "Their magic hat is a Panama rat that consists of an electroplated platypus! Fiber optics are flowing through my faces under the dream-darkening-daroom sub-serpent skies over stones and sharks' roses and loose-leaf crystal balls. Aunt Polly's weaving a microphone out of sneezes. Defibrillated into thin air. Where's that confounded bridge? Chasin' lizards in the bush! I been up in the mud so long, it looks like down in the air to me. Gods are singin' as they ride quite white mountain bikes across a bridge o' flowers into the hereover. Odin! Thor! Baldur! Damn, look at you *elegant bastards!* Breed to survive, body-surf the lucky windstorm. Brush your teeth with lightning on Saturdays. Wink by on a happenstance. And you ain't gotta knock back at that. It's just a tad out of whack, Jack."

Joaquín calls François to him and chants one of his wobble-songs, *Yan-kë, yan-kë, yuu-ri; yan-kë, yan-kë, yuu-ri*—"I see, I see, now; I see, I see, now"—while shaking a mamecocó, *sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh*

Gus rattles on, "Under the lion's cage, I cared about your rage, it's true. It's the time's hum-dream. Chinchillas an' salt. Their sky god's name is Tengri. Now that's a Norse of a different color. I've learned a lot about America just by lookin' inside my own head. Batman thirteen, Emily Dickinson seventeen. Comical clicking wind-sucking clown bomb only four at this early stage. The hemlock's dread juices! And all its dread uses! Nature balances on the tip o' my brush. Long live the dead! What's that ringin' noise comin' from the desert?"

This is it, I think. Raw poetry. Inspired madness is how it began. The collective soul of humanity bubbling up through a human voice.

Dave says, "Gus, could you be quiet, please? Don Joaquín's trying to heal François! This is really important."

"Dwarves are jumpin' up and down on my eyelids," says Gus. "Statue of beef. If you have to live in a cave, you may as well paint bison. Sometimes the price is seein' the whole world green out into a jungle where voids are blooming like hen-flowers. My great-great-great grandfather keeps millions

o' snow-white bees, each of 'em as big as your fist. And I really sense quite white mountain bikes out there waitin' for us too!"

"Hey, Gus, I'm asking you to *quiet down*, man! You can't make that kind of racket when don Joaquín is curing!"

"This just in from outer space: human identity is as infinite as the universe is! I fell in love with the girl with the mole on her upper lip. Then thinly-described masses o' soft air become solid there! Yeah! Right! I got wet sand! Can the leopard spot its changes? Why are Afghanistan and Utah neighbors? Jonathan! Saddle the chickens! We're riding into the mountains! Don't forget to bring the rifles, in case the mice ambush us again!"

"Gus! *Shut up!*"

To me, the babbling's not a problem. Joaquín is focused on his patient, his song, his leaf fan. But Gus is getting on Dave's nerves and Dave is getting on mine.

"Gus," I say, "what do you say we go outside? It's really nice out there."

Our naked friend springs to his feet and lopes outside, commenting, "Flying lion shadow and the phantom o' distance! Insane spherical jaguar an' the exploding wren. Cheetahs are sagey, tarsiers persnickety. Think things through—think *through* things! Blessing or disease? Foreplay or aftermath? Mood or desire? Lucy! To the sparkle-field! Have you never seen a road look like a snake? I'll get there last week! I've never done that anymore."

I follow Gus, worried he might run off and jump in the river—a worst-case scenario during a ceremony. I can grab him by the hemp choker he wears around his neck if I need to. But he just strides off into Joaquín's banana plants, exclaiming, "Set sail for the Crimson Sea! And if so, why not? How many *time* do we have and have been? How much hours where flowers grow like powers!" And he vanishes among the shadows—the crickety shadows, the listening shadows.

Noctambule, my mind murmurs. Night Walker. The name of an all-night pizza joint in Cannes, south coast of France, 1989. I had the Capricciosa—artichokes, ham, mushrooms, olives. Capricious pizza for a capricious mind.

I'm not hungry now, though. Nor as capricious as before.

Gus's speech, blurred by distance, flows like the river itself.

I sit on a floor-beam of the unfinished hut, lean back against an upright post, stretch my arms, crack my back. It's a good night for cool air, stars, quarter moon, and high, faint, rippled clouds. What could be better than that soft sign language, those elements gesturing in the sky? I'm content. I used to be the unstable one, but now I find myself in a calmer role, as if reborn or—dare I think—maturing.

Gus ambles back out of the shadows, babbling cunningly. "Then what's the difference between a duel and a duet? Dalí would know, but I can't ask him—or can I? Toanké, when Artemis saw Actaeon watchin' her while she was naked, she didn't want his body, she wanted his soul! *That's* why she had him torn apart by his dogs! Then he turned into a spirit, and the two of them were free to do whatever she wanted!"

Gus entwines his fingers in my bead necklaces and pulls like a vine on a tree. "It's all about love, Toanké!" he crows up at me. "That's what makes up the universe! Everything's made o' the most intense love, and it just keeps on comin' back! Life's an iceberg, and snakes come wrigglin' out of the water to live on it, because o' love!"

"Yeah, but don't grab my necklaces, dude," I say, unwilling to be stern with him. Maybe this is the relationship between vines and trees, I suddenly think: trees can support the weight of vines, and are too charmed by their loopy affection to be angry.

"Man," says my vine, "I'm so *in love* with this girl *Mariko*. She's *mad* beautiful. She's Japanese, but she's lived in the States ever since she was ten."

"Don't hang on my necklaces," I warn him. "You're gonna break 'em."

"She's five-five with this perfect oval face and lips like cherries! She's a drummer in this girl band called Moomintiger. We hooked up six weeks before I went on this trip. I'd love to share her with

you! Ha, look at you, you're so cute, you got dimples when you smile!"

He pauses, grinning up at me, his fingers woven into my necklaces, eyes shining in the moonlight, ideas whirling in his head. "This stuff makes you understand so much! It's crazy! The Beat writers! We *are* those guys! Ginsberg and Kerouac and Cassidy!"

"Sure, but if you break my necklaces, I'm gonna punch you in the nose." I can't think of anything else I could say to get his attention. Of course I don't mean it, and he ignores me.

"Gandalf and the elves! The elves *musta* had this stuff. Tolkien didn't have it but he had to *know* it. He *had* to! It's *the divine vine*!"

A necklace snaps. It's one I bought last year, made of *lagrimas de San Pedro*, Job's tears—smooth, spherical seeds—, strung on chambira fiber, which, after all, is brittle, as I found out my first night of yagé when I broke though Don Joaquín's old hammock.

Now, gray orbs are scattering in the moonlight.

"Damn, you did it! Would you pick those up off the ground now, please?"

"Uhh. Sure."

We get down on all fours and start picking them up.

"Whoa. Really, really sorry about that, Toanké."

"Don't worry about it. We'll get the rest tomorrow. There's still some under those boards. Let's go back inside now, huh?"

"Yeah, OK."

We pick our way back to our places in the hut. The others are sleeping, or resting, quietly, in visions. At times like this, the gateway to dream is clear and bright. We wrap blankets round ourselves and doze.

In the morning, while Gus was putting the pots and pans and silverware back on the shelves, Dave went after him. "I hate to say I told you so, but I know more about this stuff than you do, and you went against what I told you, and you blew your mind, and you trashed the place, and you may even have prevented Don Joaquín from healing François."

Shamed, Gus muttered something defensive, bitter. He didn't have much ground to stand on. To hear Dave tell it, he had none.

I didn't feel I could defend him, because he was too embarrassed to look at me, dimples or no dimples.

François caught a ride up the river, saying, "Without spices I can live not. But I feel so much better! I will write you, my friends, from where I will go to explore cooking; or Hawaii or Thailand, I don't know. But I will write you! I promise!"

* * *

Au gourmet-gourmand je te donne toute mon amitié, the Québécois had written in my journal before he left. *I hope all your dreams can come true. Remember you I have a "elephant memoire"*

you friednd

François Meyer

* * * * *



Panama Hat

Facing me from a shelf in the closet is
My dad's old Panama hat,

Pale yellow warp of woven *paja toquilla*,
Broad band black as a mourner's sash.

I bought it for him for thirty bucks in Quito in '99,
Wore it on my head that day

Like a flag printed with the words "I'm rich!"
So thieves followed me into a Brazilian rock shop

And took from behind the counter
My knapsack with its irreplaceable

Seven hundred fifty dollar plane voucher
And two hundred fifty in cash. Just like that

I was out a thousand bucks, so instead of
Going to the States for only a couple weeks

For my cousin's wedding, I made the choice
To leave Ecuador for good. Quit

My jobs at the newspaper and the language school,
Left the human skull and the four-meter anaconda skin

To my friend Celso the shaman, who was then raided
By the police, and, based on the skull, briefly jailed

On suspicion of practicing witchcraft. Meanwhile,
Back in Ann Arbor, I practiced English teaching.

My dad wore the Panama hat around the pool of his condo,
Where it may have helped get him laid. At least,

I see him wearing it in a story a beautiful, drunk stranger told me
Years later at his memorial service, though it wasn't the hat she mentioned,

But his sexy legs, the way he looked hot in swimming trunks
Despite being sixty, nearly three times her age.

Her boyfriend torn between desires to leave the house,
To tell her to be quiet, or to respect the solemnity of the memorial,

Her story came out in blurred fragments
As, unsteadily, she clutched a plant as a gift for my dad's girlfriend.

Dinner and drinks at The Earl. Back at my dad's place, they watched
Sid and Nancy. He joked that his neighbors would probably

Think she was a prostitute. And (here, she changed the topic)
He always encouraged her to stay in school and become an art historian.

Facing me from a shelf in the closet is my dad's old Panama hat,
Pale yellow warp of woven *paja toquilla*, broad band black as a mourner's sash.

* * * * *



**Easter**

The whole physics of being a ghost
would have been lost on the no-names

A body must vanish
for them to believe

“Don’t worry about the guards,”
he said, somewhere in the

shadows of supper.
“They’ll be easy,

same for the stone
which is already made to roll back.

For 40 days a former actor
will walk among them,

a skinny guy with a beard—
he’s got it down cold.

It was inside job,
all about the money

not enough to get rich
but something.

None of them had any skin in the religion game.
So his hands and feet

were torn from the cross
with the nails still in,

the smaller hand and foot bones snapping like crackers.
He’d bled out by then,

his body translucent.
His skin was roughly cleansed

and he was wheeled away.
Then came the slightest of scuffles

on the way to the tomb,
a few hecklers in the crowd,

forcing the procession into an alley
where they wrapped his body in

an old bedsheet,
and threw him up on their shoulders

and carried him off like a rug.
In a grove of laurel

they buried him in haste,
like a murdered lover,

his bony toes sticking up
like scrub oak in winter,

while linens full of myrrh and aloe
were laid in the tomb.

Later the guards were sedated
and the tomb cracked open.

The women soon came,
and they wept, on queue.

“No stone could seal His ghostly
vapor,” they said,

or something like that.
While from a dark plain

Jesus watched.

* * * * *



Exodus

The tree felt empty because the owl left, and the music of the pines
was trimmed by a chainsaw into only two notes, played with a vibrato.

The grass burnt up from Roundup; it hadn't felt right for years.

The seeds went on strike for better potting soil.

All the oceans were filled with oil,
And the water birds said, "Why have you forsaken me?"

They said this to the bumblebee because God left town with all the people
and animals tossed in a suitcase; there were only half a dozen.

The bumblebee is the only one left of his generation.
He taught the pines the vibrato, and he only does solos.

The fields begged for a plow; the sky did not know how.

The wind was scarred by chemicals, and the periodic table collapsed.

The orchids said, "We'll try to start over."
The roses stared in disbelief.
The weeping willow was too filled with grief to cry anymore.

But you've heard all this before, so why don't we just skip this chapter,
and not waste the paper?

(At this the audience laughed out loud because the forests
had a bad reputation for being pimped out for paper,)

and the poets hiding in caves (forgotten by God)
felt ashamed of using so much.
There was no more peyote to make them find a vision.

The devil was proud and sent an ever-darkening cloud to dim the sun,
who had long been set to run anyway,
and so bid goodbye to the lullabies she'd learned.

The sand was the only one concerned.

The rain didn't even feel like coming around.
The Puget lost its sound.

The shrubs drew swords: "We'll fight to the end."
The moon had its doubts.

And a rumble came from the belly of the black holes.

* * *

Tomcat's Sermon

Thus spake the prophet Tomcat, who had come to warn the people
but got caught up in the sound of a Whippoorwill whom he found to be
quite lovely. He gave up prophecy for evangelism.

"And so it shall be that the Exodus will come to pass if the people fail to
change. They must fall in love with the earth immediately. They must praise
her all the day long. They must build temples in her honor."

At one time, the Nile was worshiped as a god, and the poets glorified her.

Langston Hughes: "I've known rivers."

The sun was adored as well, and written and sung about.

Andrew Park: "A glorious orb is the sun. Who shall describe his flame?"

"I shall describe his flame," said Tomcat the evangelist and true poet,
(a fellow with a sketchy past in which he might have referred to a woman as
"some dame" and promptly forgotten her name, but now
there is this Whippoorwill, and he can't get the song out of his head
but he must preach anyway.)

"The flame of the sun starts in a distant green country.
It never bows to anything or anyone.

"The flame of the sun erupts in fertile lava as a result of his lovemaking.

"The flame of the sun catapults energy southward and inward,
and falls on altars and burns them up.

“The flame of the sun is a supreme priest and a pharaoh
bent on making history.

“The flame of the sun says, ‘She is smoke and ash, fire and brimstone,
and I love her.’

“The flame of the sun kisses the feet of the earth and unbinds them,
and bids them walk.

“The flame of the sun illuminates Tutankhamun’s tomb,
and unwraps him so that his gold face gleams and he becomes a god.

“The flame of the sun puts everyone in the Middle Kingdom, with lion,
crocodile, and hippopotamus.

“The flame of the sun enlightens a culture, and impregnates poems.

“The flame of the sun survives in art and architecture,
and makes every day holy.

“The flame of the sun is rekindled in community, with the candle-keepers,
in monasteries and bars and creativity salons.

“The flame of the sun is cyclical and harmonious and perfectly in tune
every time.”

Thus said Tomcat, also known as *ka* and *ba*, a person’s double,
a spiritual ram, a spiritual entity, to his Whipporwill,
who grew silent to enjoy the reading.

* * *

Coyote: Trickster

I.

The Navajo say that in the beginning, the sky and the earth touched,
and at the spot where they met, Coyote sprung up out of the ground.
He cannot be hunted, but he can be found.

Coyote is called upon by the earth for help to stretch its boundaries,
imagined and real, and he is not afraid to steal, if it is necessary.

Slim muzzle, light on his feet, known for slipping
easily across borders, coming and going, back and forth with ease—

but in reality, he's a little . . . on edge, if you please,
a little tightly strung on the wire.

I heard he sets the night on fire.

How else to maneuver, negotiate with sleepy border guards,
or time the crossing with shadow and light.

If he wants, he breaks the lights by throwing rocks,
then carries immigrants across.
His aim is true. If you ask, he'll carry you.

In some Native American creation myths, coyote is the Creator himself,
but this is not his only role. Coyote has a daring soul.

He transforms himself into a variety of beings including a fool
or a cultural hero.

He is a controversial character, and a catalyst for change, so if the world
around you looks a little strange, he might be near.

We never know when or where he might appear.
He is also known for uninhibited lust and associated with sexual power.

He shows up looking good and hungry at the cocktail hour.

Canis latrans, brother from the other side of the coin,
the rusty side to your shiny penny,
but no less slick for that,
greased up as he is,

and free,

and loose,

and females like that ragged breath he draws with excitement

just before he makes a move.

Coyote has nothing and everything to prove.

II.

In the 1960s, a woman named Margo St. James fell into a lifestyle that led to an arrest for turning tricks, of which she was not guilty,

but a label sticks. After that, the doors for regular jobs were closed, so the fable came true. She laid the law down, so to speak, all over town.

Police, judges, and lawyers—tricksters all—were regular clients of St. James' contextual sexual science.

During the years that followed, she met the writer Tom Robbins at a kind of commune she was living in, and as she prepared his breakfast the next morning, he said, "I know you. You're the coyote trickster."

With that, she had the acronym for a new sex workers' rights movement: Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics.

Coyote is said to be able to change the direction of rivers and create new landscapes.

Put him behind bars, and he escapes.

III.

This old boy can't stay long; his ears are pointed in a different direction,
his strategies beyond detection.

You'll see his grizzled gray-brown coat slip away before dawn,
this one you built a dream upon, when you are safely on the ground
where you wanted to be, having lost your old fears and adopted new ones,

of never seeing him again, or hearing his stories of bravado,
half of which he might be making up. He'll say, "Gotta go. Look me up."

It doesn't matter if you take action. He is a master of distraction.
He will bring you untold, if temporary, satisfaction.

Like you, the earth is tangled up with coyote, her solace in the night,
her red tail light, but he's headed back to mountain, swamp, or forest.

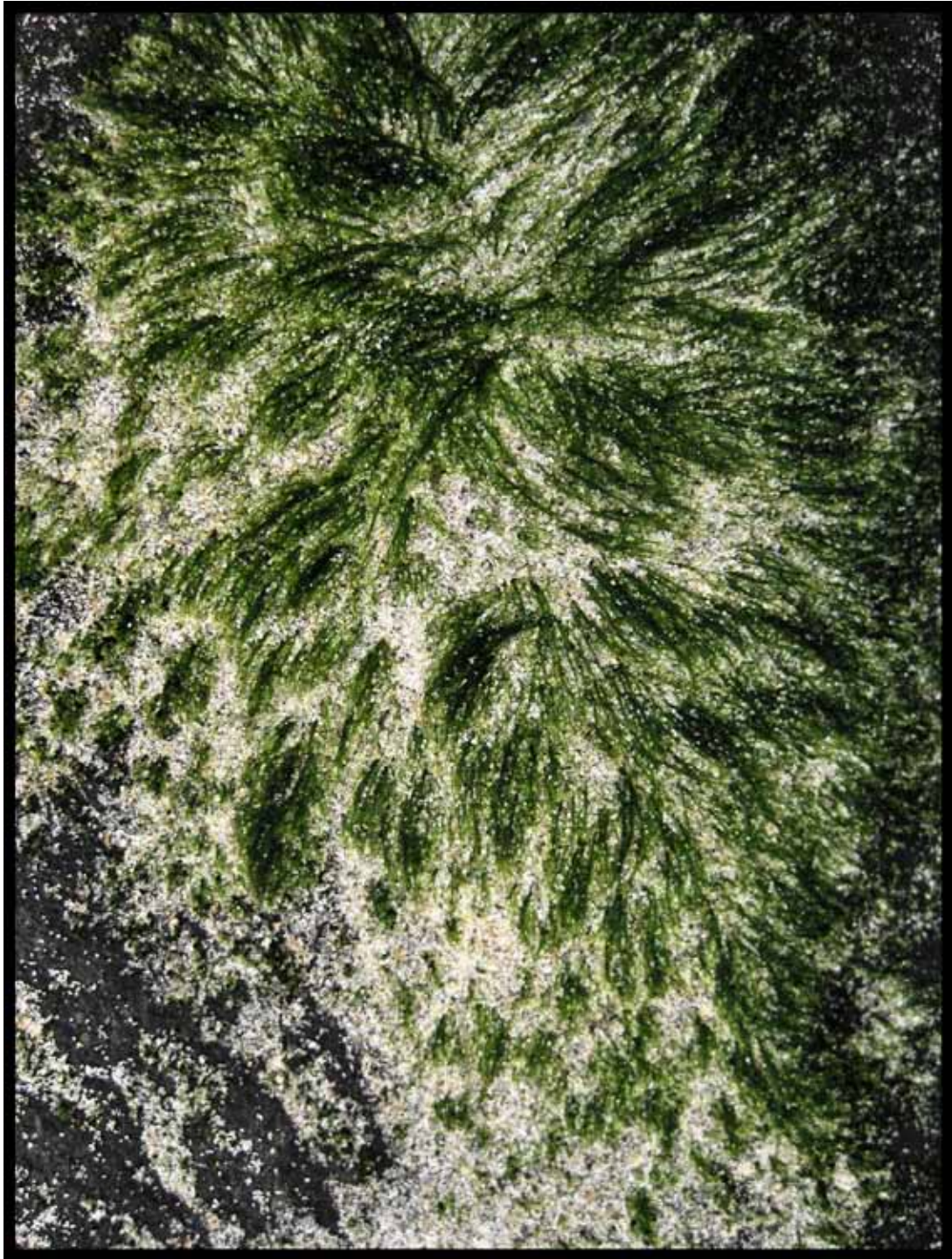
The earth's coyote is a tourist.

The Navajo have said, "It will avail nothing to be angry with Coyote,
wrathy words and loud commands will not influence him."

Coyote controls the rain, and it is he who stole the stars and scattered them.

* * * * *







Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

Until You Get Back

In 1936, William Thiele's son, William Webster, went missing for fifteen days. Thiele was a wealthy financier in Chicago, and he put detectives on the job of locating the boy, whom he believed "artfully planned his disappearance and thinks he is either on an adventure quest or determined to make his own way in the world."¹

William Webster had the family chauffeur drop him off near a friend's house, presumably to play tennis, but that friend was actually out of town. Police around the nation went looking for him, and he was found safe and sound.

Most less advantaged people cannot send the helicopters and private investigators out en masse to search for their missing children or other loved ones, and there are many, many missing people in America. Some cases are more complex than others because it's possible the people walked away from their lives, but others were almost certainly taken against their will. Groups like Between Grace and Grief and EquuSearch provide support to family members and other loved ones of the missing. EquuSearch works with families regardless of their income levels or any other characteristics. On its website, I found this message:

*Close your eyes, and try to imagine that you learn that your mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, grandmother or grandfather has disappeared. You start asking yourself, "What happened to them?" "Are they hungry?" "Are they cold?" "Has someone harmed them?" You begin to worry because they haven't taken their much-needed medication. "Did someone take them somewhere?" The most common and agonizing thought in many family members' minds, when they're thinking about their missing loved-one is, "Where are they?"*²

When my father was missing, my feelings were complicated. He had hurt me and my mother; living with him was toxic and dangerous. I cannot say that I missed him as a daughter might normally miss a father. Nevertheless, I felt loss, grief, and confusion. I had love for my Dad on some level and, more importantly, I needed and wanted a father. Most of the time, I did not think about it. I had a good mother and a good life, though I did have problems with depression and anxiety at times.

I had a red painted toy box that had been converted from a military box Dad had. It was one of the few possessions of his I had. Sometimes he did not seem real to me. Sometimes I believed he was dead. Sometimes I had the strange idea that I was adopted, maybe because I looked different than most of my family.

Mama did not talk about Dad. She was a private person, and held her pain close to herself. When she was upset, sometimes I only knew because a vein in her cheek would pulse; she must have been holding her jaw tight to keep from crying or because she was angry.

When people are separated, for whatever reason, they may feel that something isn't quite right with life. They are in a state of perpetual waiting, hoping, expecting. In a letter from my Granny Moon to Papa Moon when he was in the army in 1945, she wrote, "There is usually a crowd here with Ed, Thomas, and them, but it is always the same and will be until you get back."

She was largely housebound because she was caring for her mother, and wrote that the days were long: “I just couldn’t get to town with Mama so bad, I couldn’t leave the babies all day.” My great-grandmother, Mary Lou (Briscoe) Hyatt, is another person I never knew, but I have her dresser here, a beautiful piece of handmade furniture. She died of a heart problem, common in my family.

Missing somebody and not knowing whether you will ever see him or her again is a different kind of heart problem.

* * *

Inheritance (Eternity: How Long)

Granny Moon’s sister Savada married a Hillis, and among Granny’s documents was a Hillis family history written out by hand, beginning with the “earliest known ancestor of the present Hillis family generation.”

That fellow was Samuel Hillis, “borned in Scotland in 1707 and come to America as a young man.” When Samuel died, he left in his will the following provisions:

To his beloved wife, Anne, he bequeathed three cows, her mare, spinning wheel, bedclothes, and possessions for the farm for her lifetime.

To Sampson, one third of the farm, the plow, mare and (wedges?), and one cow.

To Samuel, Jr. one third of the farm, the family house and implements, three cows, one calf, and a mare.

To Robert, one third of the farm.

To daughter Elizabeth, her mare and saddle, three cows, and her bed and furniture.

To daughter Anne, her white mare.

To daughter Martha, five shillings in hard cash, which equals 65 cents.

Below these lines was a note: “it seems that John & Parker were left out.”

Samuel’s gravestone says he died August 7, 1782, and bears the inscription “Time is short. Eternity: how long.”

My inheritance was Granny Moon’s scrapbook and her mother’s dresser, and a few things of my mother’s, and these are worth the world to me. These and some family writings—those of my cousin Rodney, for instance, who wrote “Portrait of a Beautiful Lady: Living with Cerebral Palsy” in one of his classes. Rodney died several years ago of a brain tumor related to AIDS because he did not have health insurance, and so the world lost the person who put this down on paper about his Aunt Mary Margaret (“Sissie”) Moon:

Walking into Mary Moon’s room you get the feeling you are walking into the domain of a very secret person who has filled her surroundings with every little memory of a life time. Hundreds of trinkets, ceramic figures, pictures, and long-play records line the wall and shelves. On one side of the room sits her bed and on the other a card table. That is where you’ll find Mary sitting in a straight-back chair equipped with wheels, working on a new project or readying herself for church.

Rodney’s focus in this piece is Aunt Sissie’s dignity, her wealth of personhood, her strengths as they are magnified rather than minimized by her physical challenges. Reading of Aunt Sissie’s long-play records made me smile because my own office walls are covered with albums and 45s, and at home I have a phonograph that regularly plays my albums ranging from classical music to more contemporary works. My family has given me an inheritance of music as well and, for all of these reasons, I am wealthy.

There was a row when my grandmother died in 1988, as it appeared that some money had come up missing. Amidst the talk, my Uncle Willie Bob became upset with the family and did not

speak to most of us for years. He had already experienced the pain of a divorce, and he told my mother on the phone once that he felt no one in the family loved him. He did not come to her funeral or that of other family members. At one point, I wrote him to say that Mama had loved him and so did I. He did not respond.

Another cousin recalls hearing that when asked about his family, W.B. said, "I don't know those people." Everyone felt the pain of this estrangement and felt helpless to do anything about it. Aunt Faye and others went by to see him, and he did not answer the door. Uncle Leo said as far as he knew, no one had ever been anything but kind and loving to W.B. Nevertheless, this youngest of Mama's eight brothers perceived a wrongdoing, felt a deep and personal hurt, and has only recently begun to emerge from the habit of separation, of insulation.

As I understand it, alcohol and depression are factors in this situation, as they so often are. My cousin Marlon said, "He just wants to be left alone." I contacted his son Robert once, a cousin much younger than me whom I do not know well, to say to him also that he is important to me despite our distance growing up.

As far as I know, none of us is rich in material goods, and none of us is particularly worried about it. I once foolishly asked Papa, when I was trying to fill out one of those "grandparents' books" in which you record family history, how he would describe the style of his home. "Early American," he said, and laughed out loud. No fine belongings. Nothing but love to leave behind, love and the desire to be forgiven. I thought this week of Miss Havesham of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, full of her terrible regrets, asking only that Pip, when she was dead and buried, might write out her name, and underneath it write, "I forgive her."

* * *

No Money, No Ride

These are Dad's memories of the Lamar Motel, where he lived for a number of years:

"Those Indian people who owned the motel saved my life. I had been at a bar, sitting next to this woman, and it almost seems like she put something in my drink because I got drunk fast, a lot faster than normal. I told her I was going outside to get some air, and I went around to the back of the building and lay on the air-conditioning unit to get the cold air.

"The next thing I knew, I woke up with two guys beating on me, kicking me repeatedly, and I tried to get to my knife. They saw I was trying to do that, and kicked it out of my hand, did a number on me, took my billfold, took the money out of it. When they left, I crawled on my hands and knees back into the bar, and people came running to me. I was all bloody and stuff. I said, 'I've been robbed, I've been beaten up.'

"They called the police. I was embarrassed. The cops found my billfold and said these same guys went across the street to another bar and beat up somebody else there. I had three broken ribs. My friend, an older guy who lived in the woods, a drunk, I told him, 'If you'll come and take care of me, get me to the bathroom, etc. I'll keep you out of the woods for a few weeks until I get better.'

"The Indian people knew I couldn't work or pay my rent for a few weeks (I had to pay per week), and they let me pay when I was better. If it hadn't been for those people and my friend, I don't know what I would have done.

"At another motel, up the road, next to the Bluetop Motel, summertime, there was a guy there named Sonny, and he was mean, but he liked me. We were sitting out there drunk by the pool, and this guy pulled up in an 18-wheeler full of canoes, loaded to the gills, so Sonny said, 'Would you like to do something fun tonight?' I was high, and I said, 'Okay, what are we going to do?' He said, 'We're going to wait until everybody goes to bed, passes out, and then we'll go down to the 18-wheeler, and take some of those canoes off of there and throw them in the pool.'

“We did it—we ended up putting enough canoes to fill up the pool. We weren’t around when that truck driver went and saw all of those canoes in the pool, but I bet he had a fit.

“Sonny was a bad man. They had a place where you washed and dried your clothes. He went in there late at night and jiggled the washing machines—I don’t know how he did it without tearing them apart, but he got a lot of quarters out of there, and when the office found out it was burglarized, they about knew who did it, and he moved on, not far though. He showed me the money and said, ‘Some of this is yours,’ but I said, ‘I don’t want it. I live here.’

“I was in my motel room one night, drunk, and the guy in the room next door was passed out, too. For some reason, Sonny came and set his room on fire. I smelled smoke, and the room was burning up. I got what little I got and put it in out in the parking lot. Luckily, the man’s door was open, and I told him to get up, get out of there, to the parking lot.

“By this time, the whole block of the hotel was burning. They had an idea it was Sonny. He just did it because he was mean. The law just couldn’t catch him, and this time he moved away, and I was glad because he bugged me a lot about messing around and getting into trouble. Fire trucks, policemen all over the place. I’ll tell you how hot that fire was. They went in some of them units, and the televisions on the wall were burned up.

“I didn’t drink hard liquor much unless I was at the bar, when I would have bourbon and coke, because I didn’t want to end up living in the woods. I was working with James Adams at the time. I just drank beer most of the time. James fell in love with Irene. She would come up there and visit, and one time when we were not together, she even went out with him. She told him some personal things about me, about sex with me.

“I didn’t have a car at the time. It was probably about a year after you all left; I was just roaming around. The repo man had come to get the car. I had been living in a little run-down trailer, and the people came out in the pouring rain and knocked on the door and said, ‘We’re here to get your car.’

“I was several months behind on the payment, and trying to dodge it. They said, ‘If there is anything you want out of it, get it, because we’re taking it, along with the keys.’”

* * *

Odd Couple

The ongoing mystery of my biological grandfather has been a source of frustration. I knew his name, Leroy D. Allen, and the date of his marriage to my grandmother. But other than that, I couldn’t seem to find any information about him before or after his brief role as father and husband in 1941 and ’42. While I waited and searched, I theorized. This is what people do when we are faced with a mystery: turn it around and around in the mind, peel back the layers and try to discover the answer, to fit the missing pieces together. I received more pieces recently, learning from a cousin discovered on Ancestry DNA that her uncle, still living, is Betty Hamilton’s nephew, and he remembers Leroy and Betty.

“They were an odd couple,” he says. Neither one of them ever learned to drive; they took the bus everywhere. They had a lot of money because Leroy, who had been adopted by a Kansas City judge, inherited a fortune.

Well, that’s surprising on two levels. First, because when we last saw Betty in this narrative, she was living in a basement room, penniless, unable to clothe my father or to afford a streetcar ride to the adoption agency. Second, because she claimed to be through with Leroy—to be leaving town, filing for divorce, starting over.

His parents were still alive at the time, according to the adoption records, so I guess he came into his fortune shortly after and, somewhere along the line, he and Betty were still together. There were rumors of the two being involved in criminal activities. Leroy kept my grandmother away from the family, and eventually moved her out to Washington State.

It's true that Betty lived in Seattle, in Spokane County, Washington, in her later years. She was married to William "Bill" Cunningham in 1984, and kept that name until she died in 2001. Before that, in 1952, she went by the last name King. Places, dates, names . . . I see her as if on a map, a GPS dot moving around with vague stories on its back.

Largely, she remains a mystery to me, with years and experiences missing. What I have received are other people's interpretations of her: the Cradle superintendent, her mother, her sisters, her nephew. I yearn to hear her own voice but, except for a few representations, it is beyond my reach.

In the early 1900s, a New York socialite and aspiring writer named Dorothy Arnold and whatever her own voice might have said went missing. Her early attempts to be published had been rejected and, in order to avoid continued family teasing, she rented a post office box for future correspondence with potential publishers.

In addition to this private space, she had maintained a forbidden relationship. However, neither of these secrets seems to have been a reasonable impetus for her to disappear in the middle of the day after leaving her house to go shopping. By all accounts, she was in a good mood and planning to attend a family event for which she wanted a new dress. She ran into a couple of friends along the way, and they later described her as perfectly normal and in good spirits. Where did she go? Who really knew her?

At the beginning of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*,³ when Tom Wingfield describes the characters in this "memory play," he includes his absent father, who is nevertheless always present as a reminder of what is missing. The telephone man who "fell in love with long distances" remains in a portrait on the wall, and in a single postcard that says hello and goodbye.

His abandoned wife constantly worries that Tom is becoming like his father. Of the father, we know only the family's interpretations; we see mother, daughter, and son trying to rebuild their lives without the loved one who has abandoned them. We see Tom slowly coming to the realization that he, too, is trapped in the shoe factory life, the role of obedient, miserable son, of domesticity and control, with no room for the light fantastic.

When he leaps toward leaving, he leaps long and far—but he is haunted by the family he left behind, and all too aware of his character flaws, of his longings. The play is Tom's memory, which he sees in the soft light of a past growing dimmer and more distant.

The greatest mystery we are faced with, ultimately, is the mystery of ourselves. What twists and turns our lives take, what choices the stranger in the mirror makes. The people we were ten years ago hide—where did they go?

When, at last, we hide beyond this life, what theories and rumors will we leave behind like pieces of a story charred in a fireplace long grown cold?

Endnotes

1. *Chicago Tribune*, June 01, 1936.
2. <https://www.texasequusearch.org/the-changed-lives-of-an-un-found-missing-persons-family/>
3. Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 1944.

* * * * *





Surveillance of The Grammarians

A rocking motion then
a herky-jerky tremor.
The talented walk differently
than us, in any obvious direction.

I have been studying them.

Seasonally, at this time of year,
coats are a precaution against
our many grotesque paeans.

One novelist moved so damned fast
I was forever losing him despite
his very noticeable shoulder roll.

Crowds just whisked him away.

Luckily a depressed poet frequented
the same park bench, busily
scribbling in her Mead Composition.

But even her acknowledgement
to fellow bench sitters
possessed magical nuance.

Procedural smile and sexy shrug
hand over pale forehead,
closed-eyed sigh.

Effortlessly every Tuesday and Thursday.

* * *

Pragmatism Practiced During the Golden Years

Maybe the cockroaches
will eat your boogers
that you flick on the walls
and corners.

I am no better.

Look at these efficacious stains
my doctor assures me
are left over
from big dreams.

His notepad is scrawled
with charming signatures
as he cracks my spine thoughtfully.

The cleaning person will get a surprise
when they look under the ottoman.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

lv. Flow State

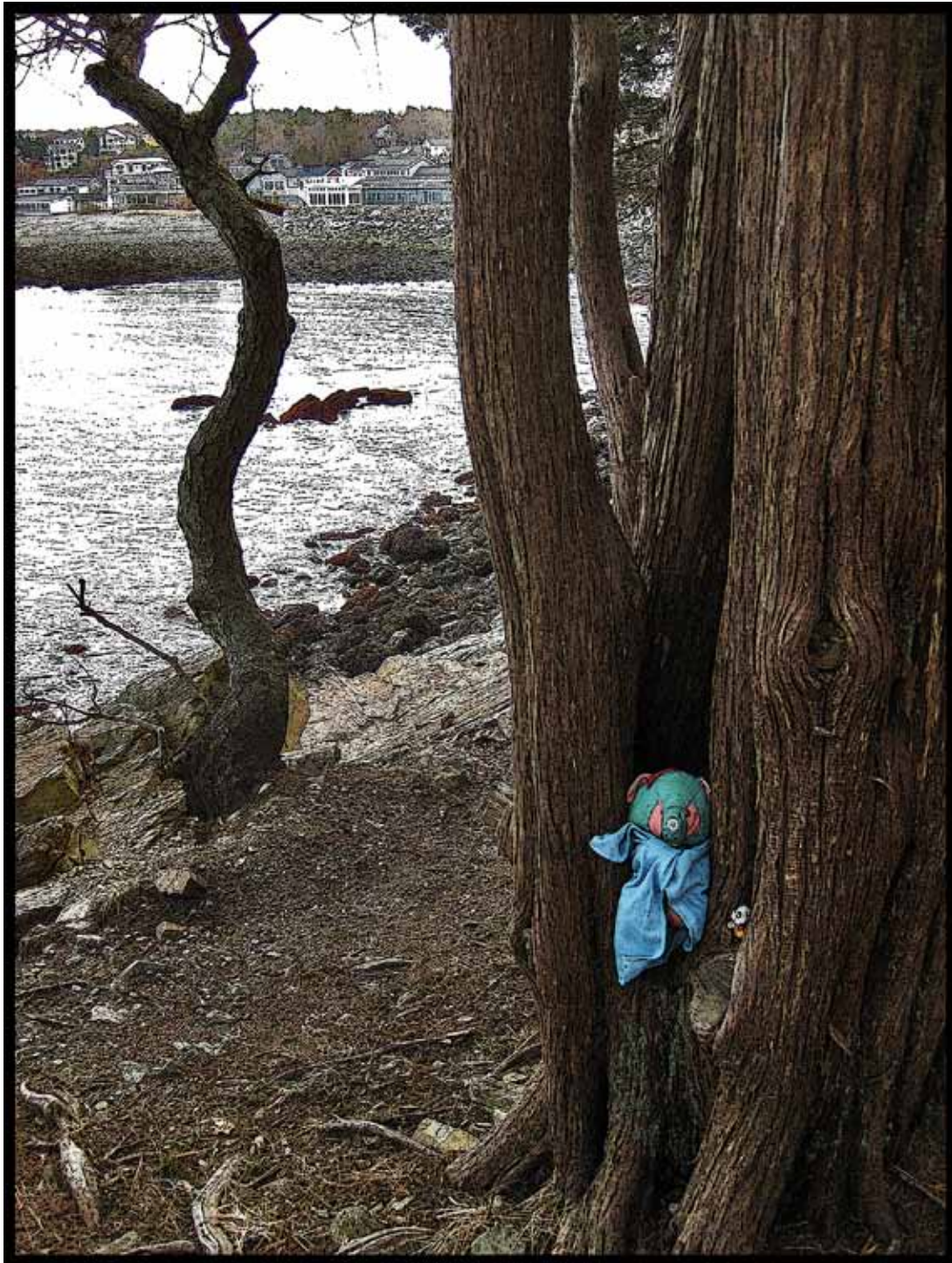
*"A love supreme
A love supreme
A love supreme"*

—John Coltrane, 1965

A roar through the millennia,
everywhere, always. From one
to many to none. A roar everywhere
made of all breaths to be, always
there, inside the skin of moments.
Bodies falling, trees, lands, others
rising, pushing, replacing. *Everywhere,
always.* A roar & its kind of questions
some men climb high to ask. *Why desire?
Why anything at all?*

What you ask now, what they had
asked long before you. Following your
father the King across the years & miles
to find this Island, this Tangled Gate.
To find me with their even harder
question: *how do we save the world?*

I know you are coming by when you
enter the Gate, by the throbbing tremor
in things what men are. You followed
no sure course to me in this Cave,
unlike how your King travelled me in
his dream. I know you have roamed
this Island fruitless days, lost in One
Woods, forgetting yourselves, softening
to more like speechless brutes.



I know it was the Creatures who guided
 you, by branch's snap, & softest *hmmming*,
 to veer you nearer, ever nearer to
 this Gate, to me. When you enter,
 you are weakened, no longer warriors,
 like spectres with nowhere else to go
 but *on*. You drink at the Fountain
 & its kinetic waters fresh your limbs
 but ungate your minds. You wander in
 wonder the vined & stoned paths.

I let you near. Each turn you
 make, I let you closer. I let
 your woodsman notice patterns
 in the leaves, your painter feel
 a rhythm to cohere your steps.
 Allow your Emandian to hear my
 barest *hmmm* & join, & urge, & near.

And you find my Cave with strength
 in your hearts again, humbled by
 all you do not know. I let you enter
 one at a time & collect in silence,
 seeing how the dark entrance told
 nothing within, no darkness at all.

You are now down endless deep in the
 Wide Wide Sea. This Cave exists now
 & long ago together. Turn, each of you,
 behold the frozen waterfalls their
 beautiful colors, study them close,
 closer still, study their pictures
 of long ago, before one became many,
 this world undivided by waking &
 dream, perpetual flow state.

Close your eyes & flow when all
 flows, *hmmm* what all *hmmms*,
 touch where everywhere touches,
 share every color, sniff & taste
 this perpetual food, peace beyond
 peace, no first or final thing to know,

until one day a splash wakes many
 from one, waking from dream,
 land from water, & choices your
 kind knew firstly, & shaped this world by.

*Life is more suffering for some than
others, so climb upon those greater
sufferers like stones up a long hill—
or learn this world enough to salve all.*

*Men are not from here, so here
is transient way to greater stars,
rewarding homes—or learn that
here is gift, here is only home.*

*Preserve this world's nature, its land
& air & living beings, its magick to keep
& perpetuate this world—or plunder
it to ruin awaiting departure of a few.*

These until distorted more & more
over time, hard voices that cried the
world as illusion, or that humiliating
empty-eyed faith in the fables
of man-godds trumped tolerance of
the world's variety, certainty over
wonder, the shine of some lives
built on the rags of others.

You landed this Island as though
to hunt me down, command with
your weapons answers to how
to save this world when all you
really sought was how to save
men, *how to save yourselves.*

Men will do none of these, yet
one will come that may. She will
come to you by the waters surrounding
this Island, King. You will return
here, alone of these, & build a new
Kingdom for her, for the choice she
will mature to make.

I then scattered your father the King
& the others, half-forgetting, half-dreaming
what they had experienced here.
Men lose nothing in their hearts,
however far distant. Perhaps to find
one another again, by your choice.

When you were a child dreaming
in this Gate, you were kind to me,
me wished you would one day keep
this world, perhaps again shape
Creatures with me to our delight.

& now you will soon choose,
soon return from those at the
far end of time who could do nothing,
those who would choose men over
the world itself, who could demon
their own minds to divide their fate
as two.

What comes, my old friend, by the heart
tendered in you, by your feeling if
this world can be salve & home & magick
enough for all.



* * * * *







The Island of Bali: The Sacred Dances With The Profane, By Firelight [Travel Journal]

i.

I saw a Kecak Fire Dance in Bali, a sacred ceremony where heavily made-up and bejeweled performers wordlessly enact a Hindu legend, such as the story of Rama winning Sita's love—until he left her with his cousin—and went to kill a magic deer apparition, but that was a trick—and then the monkey king gave her a magic ring—and the cousin tried to steal her—but she tried to tell Rama she was still alive—until the serpent—*never mind*.

The performance is accompanied exclusively by the sounds of the human voice and body. An intergenerational chorus of thirty or so shirtless men march out in crimson trouser capris, each one rhythmically clucking or clicking, chanting, clapping, you name it, permanently raising my personal standards about *a capella*. They circle again and again in opposite directions around the enormous candelabra (a three-dimensional menorah, some might say), weaving in and out of each other like a country square dance. Their movement is as hypnotizing as their chorus of sounds. The men end up seated in three rows encircling the fire in the center of the stone temple floor.

Not an auditorium, or even an outdoor stage, mind you—this performance takes place in a massive, ancient stone temple. And the performance area is defined by the cheap folding chairs that surround it. The fire is reflected in the glassy eyes of the audience, a slew of tourists sipping beers out of plastic bags. We are directly off of a bustling city street in the center of Ubud, where motorbikes race by loud and furious.

ii.

Such is the constant anomaly of Bali. Ancient and sacred juxtaposed with commoditization, sin, and industry. Commercial enterprise has wedged its way into this organic mecca. Bali is recognized as one of the most spiritual places on earth, yet that recognition may be at the root of its problems.

As a visitor on my own spiritual quest, I cringe at the thought that I am perpetuating this gentrification.

In the 1990s, people expressed concern about Bali's 200,000 visitors per year, and the impact it would have on the ecosystem, local culture, and the financial structure of the pre-industrialized island.

Today over a million people visit per year. "Visit it now, because it's going to be unrecognizable in twenty years," someone had told my dad. It's a popular spot for scuba and snorkeling, massage, yoga, surf, meditation, sex, self-discovery, and its *cheap* prices. Bali's a hop, skip, and a jump from Perth, and other cities in Australia, where the cost of living is extremely high. You can use the same amount of money to vacation conservatively in Australia for a weekend, or spend it lavishly for two weeks in Bali.

The Balinese still devote their time, energy, and prayers to the Hindu gods and spirits, but a new deity, the dirty dollar, has risen fast and harsh to its own altar. Still, the temples stand their ground.

I admire the architecture as I ride my rented scooter down the narrow streets and alleyways. It feels holy to move amongst buildings that are so old, even as I sit in the most atrocious traffic I've

ever seen. Later in my stay, I learn that this is because the government will not build any overpasses or bridges that would be higher than the temples. They also will not move a temple. There are rules about cutting down certain trees, too.

What you get is a city that has exploded with motorists, shops, restaurants, bars, cafes, vegan eateries, yoga studios, hotels, stacked around and blatantly competing with the majesty of 300-year-old stone ceremony spaces.

The pavement is littered with natural offerings: beautiful folded palm fronds encasing flower petals, grains of rice, and burning incense, offered with ample prayer by a kneeling woman in sarong. You can date the offerings pretty easily by how many times they appear to have been stepped on and run over by the motorbikes. All of the materials are natural and compostable so eventually they return to the earth.

iii.

I fret that Bali will not recover from this. Or, rather, what it was will not be reclaimed. I feel guilt as a privileged visitor, bringing money in but also perpetuating the problem. So many businesses were spawned when tourism exploded, and too many people changed occupations to accommodate the massive tourist influx. The economy has been in recession since then, leaving families scrambling to make ends meet on this rapidly gentrifying island. Such is the ebb and flow of the tropical paradise turned major tourist attraction, right?

I turn over these questions in my mind: *a people's way of life is being radically changed by colonization, tourism, modern technology, and western influence. Is it something I should look at as a tragedy? Or is this an amazing act of evolution and survival, a rapid feat over natural selection? So many people came to this land and asserted their influence, and the Balinese adapted while keeping connected to their sacred practices.*

And so many traditions still exist, like the Kecak Fire Dance! Even if that tradition is being sold at \$4 a ticket amidst the exhaust fumes in downtown Ubud . . .

I do not arrive at any answers.

iv.

The men are seated cross-legged on the floor, and their hands are extended to the knees of the man at their sides, connecting the three circles. All eyes are on them, their bare skin, their glassy eyes, their clucking mouths. Chanting at the fire, they sway back and forth, their heads making jerky motions tilted right and center, right and center, right and center.

I notice my head tilting in tune to their chattering song. Suddenly, I've teleported to some obscure Balinese jungle situation and the fire is hypnotizing me to an other-dimensional vibration. Half the audience is gaping, entranced in the psychedelic sound of their performance. The other half is looking around in fear and/or major judgment at other stunned audience members. Light from the candles flickers on the skin of the performers.

An evening gust blows through the temple, and I realize that one cool thing about fire is that it allows you to "see" the wind. The flames twist, flicker, dim, and glow even brighter. The men swaying to and fro in the candlelight give the illusion that they are flickering flames.

In my mind's eye, I see tradition as like a flame. These men are literally swaying, carrying on this tradition. As long as there is some fuel to burn, or as long as there is culture, there will always be the flame, the tradition. However, the flame dances and changes shape, intensity, and brightness accordingly with the forces around it. The flame is flexible—it responds to its environment, just as culture and tradition is influenced by geography and climate—by social, economic, and political forces—by change.

While Balinese cultural norms have shifted in response to the tourist influx, many traditions

there have remained largely the same. The highways have accommodated the temples, not the other way around. Although the people of Ubud do their daily work, some of them 12-14 hours a day, they arrange their work schedules so that they can prepare these offerings to the spirits. On holy days, the whole city is pretty much shut down.

I think of myself as a flame now, blown here and there by the weather, and by cultural conditioning, and by all of the things that have happened in my life. I begin to sway with greater abandon, feeling the pull of these forces on my soul.

I feel a connection somewhere in my navel, connecting me to the traditions of my ancestors. Images swirl in my mind's eye, of wild blackberries and succulent mushrooms, music and teachings shared around a fire, dried herbs hanging from the ceiling, making medicine and dancing the evil away in the moonlight.

Suddenly, I become aware that my movement may disturb others around me. Coming to stillness, I can still feel the heat my tiny dance generated. Deep within my body, I envision a little fire burning. The light carried through my lineage flickers in me now. The memories, traditions, the wisdom in my bones, of every being who came before me, alive in this light. Although the winds of change may cause my flight to flicker, the fuel source overflows for eternity.

* * * * *





Judih Haggai



a slow body roll
5 a.m. flashes her stuff
Irresistible

* * *

haiku on strike
no explanation
slight scent of blank

* * *

hidden source of words
coin tossed into reservoir
birth of new mantra

* * *

confusion
rain, birds, clock switch, war?
morning questions

* * *

a little rain
a series of booms
silence brings relief

* * *

after the bomblasts
quiet re-entry to morning
senses alert

* * *

colour therapy
the blackest espresso
magical smile

* * *

brain in the backseat
heart and soul behind the wheel
joyride haiku

* * *

spotlight on what is
delusions whooshed away
one precious moment

* * *

window slides open
newly sprouted leaves
a choir of spring

* * *

new season
morning excitement
my child laughs within

* * *

open windows
honeysuckle and henhouses
spring on the kibbutz

* * * * *

Langston Hughes**Dream Deferred**

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

* * *

PERSONAL

In an envelope marked:

PERSONAL

God addressed me a letter.

In an envelope marked:

PERSONAL

I have given my answer

* * *

Pierrot

I work all day,
 Said Simple John,
 Myself a house to buy.
 I work all day,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot wondered why.

For Pierrot loved the long white road,
 And Pierrot loved the moon,
 And Pierrot loved a star-filled sky,
 And the breath of a rose in June.

I have one wife,
 Said Simple John,
 And, faith, I love her yet.
 I have one wife,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot left Pierrette.

For Pierrot saw a world of girls,
 And Pierrot loved each one,
 And Pierrot thought all maidens fair
 As flowers in the sun.

Oh, I am good,
 Said Simple John,
 The Lord will take me in.
 Yes, I am good,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot's steeped in sin.

For Pierrot played on a slim guitar,
 And Pierrot loved the moon,
 And Pierrot ran down the long white road
 With the burgher's wife one June.

* * *

Suicide's Note

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.

* * *

Sick Room

How quiet
It is in this sick room
Where on the bed
A silent woman lies between two lovers—
Life and Death,
And all three covered with a sheet of pain.

* * *

Motto

I play it cool
and dig all jive
That's the reason
I stay alive.
My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:
Dig and Be Dug
In Return.

* * * * *





The Crocodile King of Belize

[Prose]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 106 | December 2018)

v. San Marcos Village - July 2010

Evening comes to the village nestled in the limestone escarpments of the Maya Mountains. The wandering village pigs come back to their masters' houses and take up their favorite places under the bed or dinner table. Isabella Chok frets as to where her children are, going from one neighbor's thatched hut to another.

The Jimmy Bus came back, but did not disgorge the children sent to market. One pickup truck came from town with ten weary laborers in the back. But no children.

Dark is the time when all need to be inside. The jungle night is a surreal thing, filled with spirits of the dead, jaguars, and unknown creatures of the dark. The children are not allowed to be out in this lightless climate. They need to be indoors in the 150-square-foot thatch house with the other eight children.

Mrs. Chok goes to every house in the village seeking her children. Jimmy the bus driver is concerned but does not know where the kids are. They were not on the side of the road when he returned, and he was looking out for them.

None of the other mothers have a clue either. They step out of their huts and look down the road as if, by looking, they will see what the frantic mother cannot. But they do not. The road to the village is bare except for the dark shadows of the jungle night filling every crevice of the land. Ants scurry to their nests. The snake climbs a mango tree. The scorpions in the thatch above begin their nightly crawl. The voices of her children are not heard. The silence of the village night is broken only by Isabella's sobs. The misery of her existence shows plainly on her worried brown face.

In her teenage youth, she was the village beauty. Her handsome husband Nathan Chok was the maintenance man for a school some white NGO (non-governmental organization) types were building to educate the "ignorant" Mayans.

But neither Isabella nor her future sweetie considered themselves ignorant, as they had knowledge of every plant and animal in the jungle. She worked with Nathan at the school when it was completed, doing the cleaning and other chores. The white people paid well and, as there were no other jobs around, they considered themselves very lucky. Rich also. They were soon married and pregnant.

Ramone was a short intense Florida white boy they met at the school. He seemed to have an endless supply of money. Ramone became fast friends with the Choks, although their friendship might just as likely never have happened, them being from such different economic worlds.

Ramone bought them food. Bought them bicycles. Bought them furniture. Bought them medicine.

But he was also a drunk and a dope smoker. He pressed Nathan to find him some marijuana, which was easy, because great fields of it grew just out of town in the jungle. Ramone would drink and smoke until he became a different person. A rage-aholic.

He'd yell and scream and brandish a dull machete around like he was going to chop someone. The schoolteachers and administrators would throw him out, where he'd bang, chop, and wail on the

wall outside.

Eventually he would collapse, and snore in the mud till morning. Come morning, he was the image of remorse, sobbing and pleading for forgiveness from all those he had insulted and terrified the previous night. Isabella would comfort him, like he was a baby lost in the wilderness, without a mother, without a friend. Ramone would buy the Choks a hundred dollars' worth of groceries.

Over the next decade, Ramone would come for a month or more every year. The Choks came to rely on his bounty and generosity, waiting for him to arrive before buying any new commodity or making any new improvement, in the hope that Ramone would pick up the bill.

Then one year . . . the school owners and teachers stopped coming. Nathan had the entire school polished after the three-month break, waiting for the new students and teachers. But they never showed.

The government had asked them to renew their visas, which meant that they had to pay a hefty bribe to the immigration officials to get renewed paperwork. They paid the bribe of a few thousand each, but then the officials wanted them to get medical exams for a similar price, as well as open a Belize bank account, and pay a monthly tax on the school grounds.

The land was in the Mayan village, but no Mayan is allowed to own land. The government owns everything—the land, the streets, the houses, the forest—and they sell it to the Chinese or anyone else with a huge cash reserve. Then they purchase all the ancient hardwood to cut down or drill oil wells in the center of the village. No rules for the government. What happened to the school owners and teachers is that the government officials got greedy on the white people, demanding payoffs of one exorbitant amount after another.

Ramone did not come that year, and Isabella had her second child. The school owners and teachers never returned. No Mayan parents sent their kids to the school to be educated. Reading and writing were thought of as “for dummies only.” Why waste time on that, when there's corn to grow and javelinas to hunt?

Students from the rich north stopped coming too. The building was deserted. The jungle slowly crept back in, as Nathan stopped cleaning or repairing anything. Books and maps were strewn around in the leaf litter of the floors. Children scribbled in the books of coral restoration, forest management, and snake species of the jungle, with no more idea of what they said than if they were Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Disrespect fueled the graffiti in the books, as in: “What did these white men think they were doing? Trying to stuff this nonsense into the population? A top-down solution designed by guilt-encumbered first-worlders—without ever asking what the local people wanted? Where is the bottom up solution?”

Nathan now spent his time around home screwing his wife. In ten years, Isabella had ten children. She was exhausted, not only from the intense use of her body, her surging hormones, but from the activities of a small but active mob of children. She wondered where they all came from, but “God” was the only answer that came to her mind.

She wondered if she had taken a different path, had learned to read as the school people had wanted to teach her. Then she might have gotten a job in the big town of Punta Gorda. She might have gotten rich and traveled the world, like all the way up to Belize City.

But that didn't happen. Now she looks ahead to the drudgery of raising the ten kids, maybe a few more, and why?

Now she wonders: “Why are we so many when we cannot hardly feed half of us? It is God's will. Whether that's the Anglo god or our ancestor god, it doesn't matter. My fate is to raise more Mayans, and forever we will endure.”

Olivia Dzul, a few palm huts over, took Isabella into the jungle to search for a particular plant. When the leaves are boiled into a tea and drunk by the woman, just before getting into the love nest, it will prevent another child from entering the house. Isabella was very thankful and dutifully picked,

brewed, and drank the tea. So far, there's been no more children.

But now she reconsiders. "Two of my children are missing. The void is too great to bear. I must have a chorus of tiny voices around me. Now I have lost two children, and another is dying in my arms."

Before the long night, before the Choks climb into their well-trampled bed, by the light of one candle, Isabella whispers close to her husband: "Tomorrow we have to go to the police. They can find the children."

"We go," he says.

vi. Planning Belize - February 2008

It's been a great ski season up in Aspen. The snow is five feet deep and as powdery as the white dust snorted on the Silverado Bar. JC started out skiing all the hills with Rose, proving to be a reasonable skier, but clumsy. He was not the smooth instructor he had claimed to be, but did show himself to be an accomplished orator, with his excessive pontification and frequent stops on the way down the hill to explain some irrelevant detail. JC managed by this process to demonstrate his skiing adequacy to the smiling Rose.

In midwinter, Rose took JC to the top of a double black diamond run (the most difficult) to, as she described it, "set ourselves free in space." He was terrified out of his mind, but didn't reveal his fear. He knew that his skill was marginal at best here, and there was a fine possibility of being killed.

Nevertheless, he launched after her with a false smile, and tried to keep up. The hill was icy on top, being at ten thousand feet. Soon after the descent began, JC got his skis locked in a rut facing downhill, which accelerated him instantly to close to 50 MPH. Panicked, he threw himself on the ground, sliding upside down for another two hundred feet until he smashed into a small tree.

Great pain. A twisted and mashed ankle. Rose is beside herself in agony, repeating how she is so sorry. "Oh my god! What will we do now?"

A cell phone call. The ski patrol now smoothly floating up, as easy as if they were on the kiddy hill. JC's long body is tied up in a knot of legs, skis, and tree. Eventually, they untangle him and get him on the sled. Then they ski down the mountain, towing the sliding stretcher, front and back, with the grace of two maidens carrying a coffin of flowers.

A doctor sets the ankle, using Rose's medical plan. Now the boyfriend is crippled. Now he cannot ski—which is everything in Aspen. Rose calculates the best way to keep her hooks on this amazing wild man is to have him move in with her. Although JC protests, it is his heart-of-heart's dream. Into the belly of the billionaire beast. *Ahhhhh! Success!*

The estate has everything. Servants, grounds keepers, a conservatory built on to the house, a heated indoor pool, an eight-car garage, shop, fourteen bedrooms in the main house, six bathrooms, two kitchens, and an entertainment room that rivals the Specter 6 movie complex in town. JC lives over the garage in a fully decked-out "apartment" of four bedrooms, two baths, a surrounding porch, kitchen made with granite counters, a study, and a view out to the ski mountain.

"This is the comfort I deserve." thinks JC, as he slumps into a leather couch, his cast up on an ottoman from Morocco. Rose brings him a white bread and tuna sandwich and they sip beers together, a moment of food and drug together before she goes out to shop with The Girls.

The parents, the owners of this castle, are only in Aspen for two weeks of the year, leaving Rose to handle the "help" as she sees fit, which is not really at all. The property manager takes care of all that—including hiring, firing, and paying the people scurrying around the massive manor.

This year there are lots of Guatemalans working on the place: shoveling snow, trimming trees, washing hallways, and painting back rooms. Last year's crew of Mexicans stole various baubles from around the house, showed up erratically for work, and had a sneaky obsequious attitude. These Guatemalans are more educated, more efficient in their work, preferring to get the job done rather than

fuck off all day.

In an email to Mom and Dad, Rose explains how she has met a wonderful man and he has taken up residence in the carriage house. In a few days Mom replies that this is all right, she just wants Rose to be happy, and would she please count the silverware, as well as keep an eye out for its safety. The Mexicans cut the spoon supply in half, one spoon at a time over six months, as if nobody would notice that the pile was shrinking slowly.

All this is relayed to JC, who puffs up as the big protector of innocent damsels, the destroyer of evil, who will *waste* any thieves slipping away with any part of the estate. Rose kisses her brave protector, checks the refrigerator again to make sure it is stocked sufficiently to feed a small Bulgarian army, snaps on her puffy parka. She then goes to meet other princesses of the elite, each of them in \$4000 worth of clothes, to drink lattes, and then to ski a few runs on the slopes to keep themselves trim.

The young beautiful rich white woman is the epitome of value in society. It is the one thing besides actual money that the police are obsessed to protect. Mexicans and poor whites may knife each other down in employee housing, and this barely warrants a report—but if a bad word is said in the company of these precious maidens, the offending riff-raff will be hauled off to jail faster than the girls can say *martini*.

Unbeknownst to Rose, two retired CIA operatives watch her from across the street. Secret and silent protectors of the gem of the Steinberg family, the Princess Rose, who the father has hired to prevent kidnapping—and the subsequent millions in ransom that would be demanded.

They have done a background check on JC and, although parts of his story are exaggerated to some extent, there is no criminal record, and no apparent indication that he is violent in any way. The operatives have previously reported this to Rose's parents, so JC glides into the lap of luxury with a smile and a song.

The bad ankle affords JC an opportunity. An opportunity to study. He has a few brain stuffing meetings with the house bartender's father, Frank. The man is quick and bright, wearing an Indiana Jones-type fedora, speaking fast through his mustache, and sporting a ten-inch sheath knife on his hip.

He says he was once called to capture a crocodile in a Florida neighborhood, and the knife saved his life, as well as made his fortune. In the attempted capture, the croc got the upper hand and was dragging him to the water's edge where he would be drowned and chewed, in that order.

Frank managed to get out the knife and split the gator from end to end down the middle of its belly. Inside were parts of dogs and cats and maybe some human bones, but along with all that was a small jewelry box. When opened, it contained two hundred carats of large diamonds, and a dozen rubies.

Frank explains the natural history of the long snout multi-toothed monsters, and JC soaks up the information. The creatures evolved over two hundred million years ago in the Mesozoic epoch, and outlived the dinosaurs. Spread over the globe in more than ninety countries, the twenty-three species of the Crocodylia order hunt and haunt the world's estuaries and marshes. The families of the Crocodylia include: the true crocodiles (Crocodylidae), the alligators and caimans (Alligatoridae) and the gharial and false gharial (Gavialidae). JC is fascinated by the crocodiles—the rulers of the kingdom, and the occupiers of Belize.

Throughout spring, JC continues to study crocodiles and the coasts of Belize. He works on a plan to create a crocodile center, where researchers the world over can come to study the animals. His vision includes a huge house, a meeting center, pens and veterinary equipment for the crocs. Tropical-looking bungalow cottages made of hardwoods with mosquito screening will be built for the visiting academics.

JC draws pictures of the layout, as well as making endless lists of supplies, and photocopying page after page of articles and essays regarding the scaly creatures.

In the evening in the Silverado Bar, JC commands a table covered in pictures and print. Rose sits with him, intently listening to his enthusiasm about the project. Sitting with them are a few ski

bums who profess that they will do everything to help him. But JC knows the offer doesn't extend outside of the bar. All talk, never any action.

Maps are spread out on the table too, maps of the Forgotten District and the tiny town of Punta Gorda nestled in its armpit by the sea. He sees that there are huge major rivers coming into the Caribbean here, perfect places for a crocodile research center.

But who owns any of this? There are no real estate offices in the area, no advertised land for sale. In fact, the town seems to be virtually unconnected to the Internet. Not a hotel nor a restaurant listing to be found. There is one reference to a backpackers' hostel run by a white man called Chat and, with that, a posted picture of the town market.

JC talks in a low monotone to Rose. The implications of what he is thinking will set him on an entire new course of life, one that could be rewarding, but also one that will be filled with struggle.

"This is our destiny, Rose," he tells her. "But we need more information than what we are getting here on the Internet."

"Yes! We need to go down there and check it out. We need to go to Belize!" Rose emphatically cries.

"No. I need to go. Not you. It could be dangerous."

"Oh bullshit. How dangerous can it be? It's one of the top American tourist destinations."

"Yes. The resorts are. But we are going right into an existing village. This place is not on the tourist track."

"You have to take me," she says.

"Why?"

"Because I'm paying. That's why."

JC thinks this over for a few moments. The logic of it is clear. She is rich and he can't even pay for the drinks. Thinking of all the possible things that can go wrong, he sighs a big lungful of resignation.

"OK. We'll go. Is your passport in order?"

"Sure as hell. Are you serious?"

"Serious as a heart attack."

"Whoopee!" she cries. "Let's celebrate!" Drinks are passed all around, and every one swills the alcohol with renewed vigor. They drink to new directions, to new horizons. To beaches and parrots and tropical sun. They drink to the glory to come.

vii. Confronting Police - September 1st, 2010

"We have to go. Go now," urges Isabella. The light is faint as the sun considers roasting this tropical land yet another day. Roosters crow amid the thatched shacks, announcing their prowess in the chicken world.

"What? Where are we going?" groans half-awake Nathan.

"We're going to town. Going to the police station. The police will help us."

"I doubt the police will help us."

"What do you mean? They are here to help us. It is their job to find our children and the criminals involved. What do you mean? Why wouldn't the police help us?" Isabella pleads with a sob.

"What I mean is, that they don't give a shit about Mayans. I don't think they will do anything about some lost kids. The more kids we lose, the happier these Garifuna racists will be."

"So what does that mean? Does it mean that you're not going to town? You don't care about your babies Benjamin and Veronica? You're gonna sit on your ass and make me go alone?"

"No, no. Of course I'll go. Let me see if George and some of the fellas want to go."

"Yeah. Bring 'em all, bring everybody," she says.

Soon Nathan and his wife climb aboard the Jimmy Bus, along with a half a dozen other men



and their wives. Jimmy is in a good mood today and says he'll only charge the gas money, which is still six dollars, and equivalent to a week's cash earned from working menial jobs.

The men talk about the upcoming shotgun registration at the police station, a yearly annoyance by the department to keep the Mayan peasants in line. The women all sympathize with Isabella, sobbing a little between hugs.

The Jimmy Bus pulls up in front of the police station, its wheels on the trampled grass of the roadside. The Mayans disgorge from the bus, but stay close to one another, like a moving football huddle.

"You have to move that bus," shouts a lesser police officer who is loitering outside as he smokes his third cigarette in a row. The Mayans say nothing and walk right by the indignant petty officer. The small mob all push up against the front counter of the police station, made about the eye-level of the short Mayans. A big black Garifuna leans over the elevated desk, looking down at the upset faces of the frowning people. Nathan speaks.

"We want to report a kidnapping!"

"*Una Huna!*"

"Our kids have been stolen. We want justice. We want you to look for them. To find them!"

"Uh-huh. *Suuure.*"

"What are you gonna do about it?"

"Uh-huh. *Suuure.*"

"Really! We want to report it! Get out some forms or something."

The desk clerk sighs out enough air to blow up a small raft. "All right. What's your name?"

"Nathan Chok. And the kids' names are Ben and Veronica Chok. They are *gone*. They were supposed to come home yesterday but they never showed!"

"OK. So how long have they been gone?" The officer yawns rudely in their faces.

"They've been gone since yesterday. They never came home from the market."

"Well, that's not long enough. There's nothing we can do."

"*What the fuck!* What do you mean you can't do anything?"

"Not enough time. These little monkey children could be anywhere. With an uncle. In a tree." He chuckles lazily.

"No. They are not. They always come straight home to the village. These kids are missing!"

"Uh-huh. Well, they'll turn up."

"We want to fill out a missing person's report. We want this noted in the record and we want you to look for them."

"*Naw*. Not gonna happen. People have to be gone for 48 hours before we make a report."

"*What?* The kids will be long since dead by then. We need you to find them *now*."

"No. Not gonna happen. Go back to your jungle and wait for them."

"These kids are gone. Don't you get it! *Gone*. We need to find them *Now*."

"*You must help us*. You must start searching for these kids," interjects Isabella.

"Lady, rules are rules. We can't fill out any paperwork until 48 hours are up."

"That will be three days that they have disappeared."

"Sometimes the paperwork takes longer. Then we have to approve the search. We're already looking for some white Americans, so it may be a while before we get to it."

The cop yawns and shuffles a few papers together. Turning his back to them, he lets out a huge fart, but makes no special notice of it. He just remains with his back to them and his odor rises and spills across the police counter.

"Hey! You have to *do* something!" cries Nathan. His voice has risen with his desperation.

"You talking to *me*?" the farting officer swirls around. "*Are you threatening me?* I can arrest you right now. Quick thing."

"No. *No*. We just want some action finding my kids."

"I'll show you some action. Some jail time action, you little monkey!"

"Please. Please help us," pleads Isabella.

"Get outta here. No report on your stupid kids. Not like you bush babies don't have enough of the little fuckers already? Now get the hell outta here!"

The Mayans stand there in amazement for moment, staring slack-jawed at the huge black obstructionist of justice. They can't believe that no police authority gives a crap.

How can they do nothing? Isn't that illegal?

The small troop backs out of the doorway to the street. They are all within an elbow's reach of one another. They slowly climb back onto the bus.

Nathan is shaking his head and mumbling under his breath. "Those fucking bastards. They don't give a shit about us or our families. These assholes only protect the rich white guys and the rich black business owners. Where is any law for the Mayan? Why are we kicked to the curb? *Fuckers!*"

Isabella is crying. Her two lady friends sit close to her in the back of the bus, holding her about the shoulders, commiserating in low tones.

The bus starts and heads on the back road out of town, bashing into ruts and potholes on the unmaintained road. The return to the village is a mumble of quiet grumbles, mostly curses, but no announcements or discussion with anyone. All of them just return to their hovels, abused by the legal system in this prejudiced land. Ignored in the jungle, verbally beaten in the street, their rights forgotten in this remote corner of the earth.

viii. Visit to Belize - March 2008

When the plane lands on the broken and bumpy runway, the passengers erupt in clapping and cheering. This seems odd to Rose, who is used to smooth controlled landings in the luxury of first class. Here the peasants are remarkably loud and yelling like their soccer team just won. A successful landing here must be something of an uncommon event.

The terminal is a shabby affair of peeling paint and tiled floor. The tile is wet from the humid air, making each step slippery. Rose moves tentatively by the wooden benches full of murderous-looking people, remarkably black with strange K-Mart clothes. She sees there is not a clean, combed white person in sight, not a smile among all the colored faces, just scowling intensity. An air of unfriendliness pervades the mood here.

The customs man is almost seven feet tall, scary and imposing. "What are you doing here?" he asks.

A little confused and unsure, JC says, "Trying to go through customs?"

"Do you think you may not get through?" the custom agent asks with a sneer.

"Why wouldn't I?" JC asks.

"Because you are smuggling drugs into our country," The agent crisply answers. "Open these suitcases."

"No. *Hell, no.* Not smuggling anything."

"Are you resisting a search?" the customs agent challenges, leaning down into JC while snapping a rubber glove on his left hand.

"No. Not at all. We have nothing to hide," mumbles JC.

The suitcases are opened and the big guy paws roughly through the clothes, finding a couple of cheap cyber cameras under the underwear.

"Why you hide these? You planning on selling cameras illegally?" This more of a statement than a question.

"No. *No fucking way.* We just each have one."

"But you have one over your arm. So this make four cameras. Who you selling to?"

"Nobody really. I might give one away."

"OK. Sure. So where do you keep the drugs?"

"No drugs. Nothing illegal," says the now exasperated JC.

"How much money you have?"

"Three thousand dollars US. And we plan to spend it all in hotels and bars."

"You are bringing cash back to your drug lord from selling cocaine." Again, a statement from the huge agent.

"No! We are tourists, here to have a good time in your country. Damn. Don't you want our money?"

The officer is quiet for a moment as he gropes through Roses underwear, so tiny and so soft they feel under his giant thumbs.

"Are you here on business or pleasure?"

"Business," asserts JC. But then—

"Pleasure," chimes up Rose who is both terrified and humiliated by the big black fingers caressing her panties. The agent slams the suitcases without clasping them. He leans in close with massively intimidating eyes, as that is the method in Belize for determining liars.

"Well then. Welcome to Belize. Enjoy your stay. Step over to that counter there and pay your tourist environmental fee to get stamped."

Hastily closing and locking the grips, they move over to an extremely bored-looking official who appears about to collapse on the table from pure apathy. Lethargically, he stamps their passports with entry ink, notes the date of arrival, and orders them to pay the "environmental fee" of \$20 US each. Finally, with what seems like a herculean effort, the clerk writes out a tiny receipt on a scrap of paper and hands it over to JC.

"Yoo must keep this to get out of the country, or dee will have to pay da fee again leaving."

JC takes the tiny scrap of paper and they take their luggage. JC turns for another glance back at the officials, just in time to see them stuffing the two twenty dollar bills in their pants' pockets.

"Don't think that saved any Jaguars," whispers JC into Rose's ear.

"Don't think what?" Rose answers, confused and unaware.

"Let's just get outta here."

Outside is a maze of shabby-looking sedans and people in various stages of waiting and expectation. A ten-year-old boy rushes up to them. "You Americans want hotel? I have taxi. We go now. Quick thing!" The boy grabs a bag and starts lugging it in one direction.

"Hey. Hold on there, fella," JC barks. "Let go of the bag."

The kid stops, but doesn't let go of the bag. "I have taxi. Take you anywhere."

Another man arrives and smiles a face full of perfect gleaming white teeth against his dark face. "Welcome. Welcome to Belize! Let me help you with the luggage to my taxi."

He puts a small octagonal brass coin in the kid's hand, who then quickly disappears in search of another confused tourist. The smiling guy carries the luggage over to a 1970s Ford sedan that has a smashed-in left rear corner and side mirrors that are hanging from wires. He loads the luggage in the trunk, and secures it with a partially rotted bungee cord.

A driver pops out from behind the steering wheel and greets them in some guttural noise. The customers climb in the back seat, avoiding the protruding seat spring. The two shady men climb in front.

Procuring a cab in central America is a community business, as there is the spotter (the kid), the handler (the greeter with the teeth), and the driver. Often there is the cab owner also. The fare depends on the customer's lack of savvy. The loot is split among all the persons collecting and transporting the customer. Unnervingly, a ride across town is often accompanied by three large con-men. It is never really quite clear if you are going to your destination, or to a back alley to finish the final details of your mugging.

JC and Rose are dropped off at the bus stop. Here a murderous-looking crowd swirls around

the waiting area and the ticket window. Hardwood benches house humanity's less handsome homies, from dowdy black women to clutches of Mayan families, each holding on to some part of the other. Close together, JC and Rose take up a position with their luggage circled around them like kids building a play fort.

A child tries to sell them cigarettes at five cents apiece. A filthy skeletal man with Kaposi skin cancer eruptions begs for a shilling. JC has no idea what that is, but when he holds out a handful of coins, and the leprous cadaver selects two of the brass octagonal coins that are stamped with the one dollar sign. A young picture of the Queen of England is on all the money, even though Belize has been independent for ten years.

An express bus roars into the terminal, narrowly missing loiterers. When stopped, the driver leaps out and yells "*nat koo mi gong Punrut Gorda.*" Crowds swarm the door of the bus. Realizing that this is the transportation they need, JC and Rose force their way into the crowd.

A small Mayan woman addresses Rose: "If you want to get on, you have to push! *You have to push!*" And, as if by example, she crouches down and mashes her way under a fence of elbows to the bus door and clambers in. Rose follows on her skirts, also making headway through the crowd to the door.

JC is left with the luggage which he has to store under in the side vaults of the bus. To do so, he loses any position in line. The bus starts with a roar and an expulsion of diesel smoke. Frantically he smashes through the cursing stragglers outside the bus howling for a seat.

"Full up! Full up!" the driver shouts from his seat.

JC crushes past the ones jamming the doorway, seeing Rose balanced on top of some carry-on luggage. She is covering a seat next to her like a gargoyle, and with a similar grimace. As the bus lurches forward, JC settles into the cramped seat. Many are still standing in the aisle, unable to get a seat. They fixate JC with the evil eye of the jealous and uncomfortable.

It's an eight-hour drive on this "Express Bus" to Punta Gorda. The end of the road. The highway is a thin two-lane affair with no shoulders, just the jungle brush. It winds dreamily through limestone mountains. The driver sees no advantage to slowing for curves. This throws the contained population from side to side like a lard barrel in a ship's hold, bodies swerving from the window to the aisle and back again.

The driver also has no fear of oncoming traffic and slices dangerously to the inside of blind corners, as well as trying to crush anybody one mile an hour slower than his juggernaut. At the first opportunity, or no opportunity, he swings out wildly into oncoming traffic to pass the slower vehicle. This not so much to gain a few moments of time as to show his prowess as a fearless driver, his supremacy on the road with this 20-ton bus—to his imagined critics, the packed-in passengers.

There are no other vehicles disputing his mania as he roars along at 60 on the 30 MPH road. The bus slows to a near stop in the villages, which are every 20 miles or so, as the machine gently climbs over a *tope*, (Spanish for bump). It is the only way that traffic can be slowed through these villages, whose highway sides are pressed with pedestrian Mayan, easy bait for a speeding vehicle.

The driver apparently knows everyone along the roadside, as he blasts his horn in both greeting and warning. Babies cry on the bus. Some drunks shout and cat call from the back in indistinguishable sounds. The sound of retching between the seats is also heard, which quiets the drunken harangue.

In what seems like a lifetime, with the sun setting through the jungle trees, the bus lumbers into the outskirts of Punta Gorda. The bus stops in the middle of the road in front of a huge rambling cement building. "Di be heah hotel," the bus driver waves at JC.

Feeling exhausted and thrashed, JC ushers Rose and the bags off the bus and waits for the driver to open the side. Once open, the driver grabs some random luggage and starts to shut the doors again.

"But this is not my luggage!" cries JC, and physically holds the door open.

Annoyed at the Americans, the bus driver commands them to get the right stuff and let him be on his way. *What is wrong with these Whities?* One stuffed bag is like another.

JC cannot believe that the driver would have left them with someone else's bags. *Where is the customer satisfaction?*

They stand in front of the building, now dark outside. Strange birds make whistling noises all around and the smell of sea—salt and garbage.

Presently, a black woman calls from an upper porch: "Wat mi yuuu be standing der fur? Be you lost?"

"Ah, hello. We were hoping you had some accommodations. A room to rent for the night?"

"Ahh room?"

"Yes, a room for us . . . tonight."

"De room mi gots. Me not know nuttin bout no commuandations. Allen! Ye gots some white people heah. Wants da room."

The woman fades back into the dark behind her and presently a tall handsome white fellow appears out of the bottom entry. "Hello there. Welcome to Punta Gorda. Come on in and I'll show you the room. New to Belize, aye?" His manner of speech pegs the guy as an educated Canadian. What he could be doing here in this unlikely place is matter of deliberation in their minds.

The room is a modest affair of 1950s-style bedding, an old couch, a yellowed toilet behind a screen, and a small sink. The travelers settle in and lay exhausted under the ceiling fan. They are still vibrating from 50,000 bumps on the southern highway.

Eventually they sleep in each other's arms. Overheated and sweaty, uncertainty all around them, they cling to each other like lost monkeys being moved to a new zoo.

The morning is filled with raucous bird songs, from the sweet twittering of tiny birds to corvid caws intent to roust somebody, anybody.

Presently, from outside their door, is Allen, loudly announcing himself. "Hey there, travelers! Want some breakfast? We have conch fritters and scrambled eggs with passion fruit and fried plantains."

"Sounds wonderful. We'll be out in a minute. Thanks."

The toilet takes three flushings, even though there is a small sign next to it asking that the "dirty paper" be put in the wastebasket. This is the most disgusting thing Rose has ever seen. The wiped TP stinks.

"It's because the plumbing is so shallow," explains JC. "It's just easier to deal with than unplugging the toilet."

"What the fuck do you mean? The toilet hasn't even worked yet," complains Rose. "Is this place broken, or what?"

"Just wash up. We'll put the bathroom trash outside the door."

In a few minutes they hear Allen again. "Hey! *What the hell is this?* Who put this shit in the hallway?"

"Umm. We did, sir. What else were we supposed to do with it? Rose has never even seen what comes out of her body. She is grossed out."

"Well, what you do is take it out to the street where the garbage cans are," Allen says.

"But we're paying for a room. Doesn't this matter come with the deal?"

"No."

"Well, that's nasty. We may have to find another place."

"Go the fuck ahead. Everywhere else in town is dirty, has the same thing with the toilet, and costs twice as much. Also, there's no food anywhere else, but around noon you can get some fried chicken at the Chinese store. So see ya, aye?"

"It's OK. I'll deal with it. Don't mean to get you all riled up," says JC.

"You mean *vexed*?"

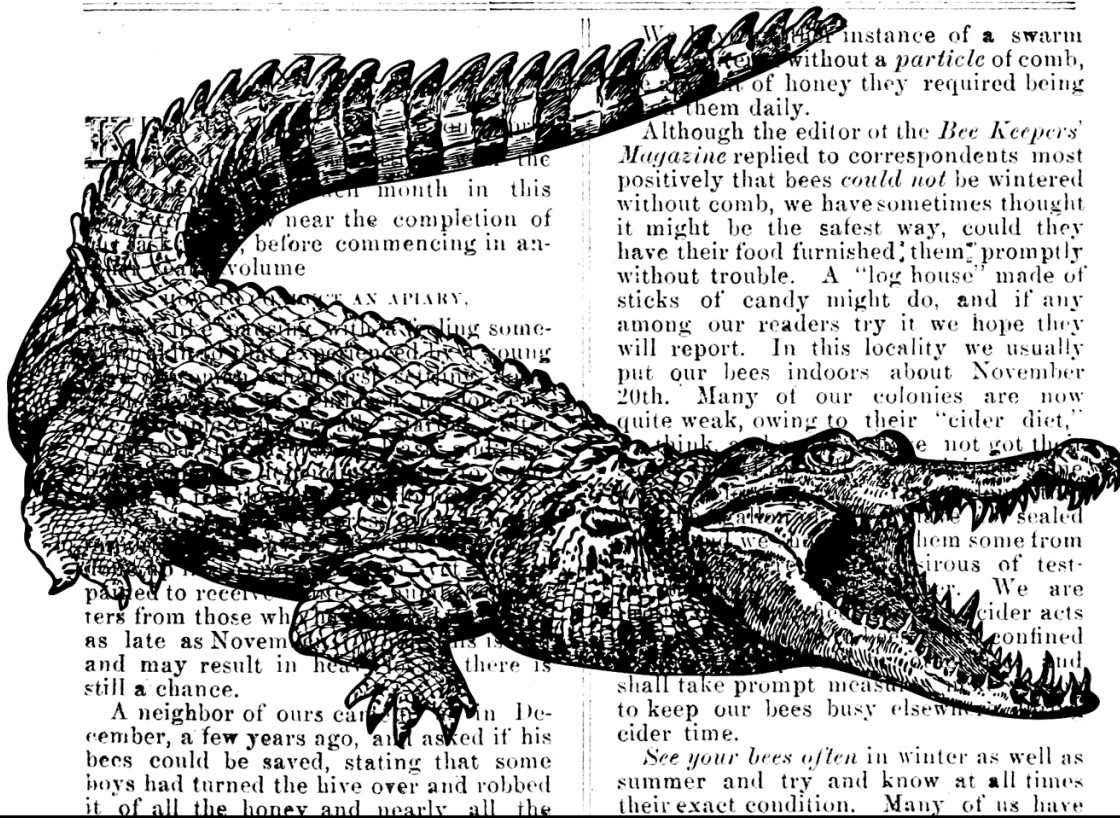
"OK, vexed."

JC carries the stinking pail out to the street. The garbage can overflows with a mass of maggots. The pail is emptied and a nauseated JC returns to the hotel dining area.

Vol. I.

MEDINA, O., DEC. 1, 1873.

No. 12.



We have had an instance of a swarm of bees without a *particle* of comb, the quantity of honey they required being furnished them daily.

Although the editor of the *Bee Keepers' Magazine* replied to correspondents most positively that bees *could not* be wintered without comb, we have sometimes thought it might be the safest way, could they have their food furnished them promptly without trouble. A "log house" made of sticks of candy might do, and if any among our readers try it we hope they will report. In this locality we usually put our bees indoors about November 20th. Many of our colonies are now quite weak, owing to their "cider diet," and I think we have not got the

best results. We have sealed them some from the desire of testing them. We are sure cider acts badly on them when confined, and we shall take prompt measures to keep our bees busy elsewhere during the winter time.

See your bees often in winter as well as summer and try and know at all times their exact condition. Many of us have

the month in this year near the completion of the year, before commencing in another volume.

AN APIARY.
The bees are doing some-
thing, and the young are

paired to receive the honey from those who have been as late as November. This is a late time, and may result in heavy loss, but there is still a chance.

A neighbor of ours came in in December, a few years ago, and asked if his bees could be saved, stating that some boys had turned the hive over and robbed it of all the honey and nearly all the

In what seems like forever, the mistress of the house comes in with two breakfast plates, piled with strange foods of many colors.

Allen the proprietor arrives and makes himself comfortable in another chair. He grills the guests with questions.

"Why are you here? Oh, looking for property? What for? Retirement? In town? Why here? Out of town, you say? Like deep in the jungle? Along a river to the sea? You have to watch out on land deals around here. Make sure you have a clear title."

"With a red dot stamp!" is shouted from the kitchen, where it seems the cook is listening in.

"That's irrelevant, Ice! Why the fuck did you bring that up?"

"Cause the stupid white man who don't be know the way off de gov'ment," she yells back from out of sight.

"Just shut up and let these people answer a few questions."

"You shut up, milk boy. You no get any brk-fast from mi."

"Ha. The ice bitch never makes me no breakfast anyway," Allen remarks to JC and Rose.

"But land. You want land. Everybody here is selling land. Lots of land to be had. But the coastal properties are a little expensive and totally undeveloped. You know who you need to talk to?"

"No clue. How would I know that?"

"You need to talk to Black Patrick. He knows everybody who is selling everything. He can fix you up."

"Da Patrick ain't nuttin but a cheap chance man. He got no license for nuttin and be taking you large" is shouted from the kitchen.

"I thought I told you to shut the fuck up!" yells back Allen.

"I thought I told you to take your skinny honkey ass back to Canada. Donn tells mi to shut!"

"She loves me. Makes me so happy. Doesn't it show?" Allen growls to JC and Rose.

After breakfast, Allen offers to bring them to Black Patrick. The three of them stuff into Allen's pickup, fighting the door to get it open, then slamming it twice to get it closed. Black Patrick lives off the road down a short jungle trail with broad-leaved plants crowding eight feet high on either side. In a small clearing is a shack sitting shakily on a dozen three-foot-high posts.

The cabin's walls are made out of the first junk board out of a sawmill. The bark board. These are nailed in a patchwork, bark side out, for the skin of the insecure structure. A good shove on the corner would collapse the whole pile of sticks. Light from one side of the building shines through the gaps in the boards and out the gaps of the other side. The Unabomber's shack was the Taj Mahal compared to this.

With a few shouts of greeting, presently there are grunts and noises from inside. A short man emerges, negotiating the jumbled boards that serves as stairs. He is very black, almost blue shiny. His eyes are wide and round with a bit of a crazy look, his dark pupils darting from side to side in the white sea of sclera. *Shifty-eyed* to the extreme.

The man wears wrinkled slacks with a Nike light blue tee shirt. It is remarkably clean, considering the sea of jungle dirt that surrounds this place.

"*Aiee. Mi jomgot naw stom jumba hon,*" says Patrick.

"What the fuck did he just say?" asks JC, looking at Allen.

"Who knows what the hell Patrick says? But he's your man. This guy knows everything, aye?"

"Mr. Allen, *mi go wat Uuuget to place wit banawa?*" says Patrick.

"What's he saying?"

"He says he wants me to drive you out to a property that he wants to show you," explains Allen.

"How'd you figure all that?"

"Just know the guy. First it's one thing, then another. Might as well do the whole program at once."

"Huh? How'd he know I was looking for property? I never said anything."

"Jungle telegraph. He is it, aye?"

"Damn. Tell him we're interested," says JC.

Patrick erupts in a wide-open-mouthed grin.

"Tell him yourself. It's not like he doesn't understand English."

"Mi da gron habla Engliees, yeah!"

"OK, OK, I get it," mumbles JC. Rose looks on baffled, not really following any of this talk so far.

With all four people mashed in the cab of the truck now, Patrick hardly has room for his flamboyant hand gestures. Rose is squished between the big Canadian and JC, with Patrick crammed against the door. With the window down, a fair percentage of him hangs out of the truck, giving the rest a little more breathing room. Presently, Allen pulls up next to a few acres of mowed field with majestic Bali wood trees spaced a few hundred feet apart.

"Dis gwan be dat mucko plaa fer two taosand arceca. Nocho?"

"What the fuck? Two thousand an acre? How many acres are there? Where's the water?" asks JC.

"Eieght. Eeeiguhth achters," replies Patrick.

"Gee, it looks so nice. Like a golf course," comments Rose.

"But not what we're looking for," says JC.

"Ggooma got next one whaat dem dnn road what."

"What the fuck?"

"He says there's another place just down the road," says Allen. The truck lurches forward with Allen's elbows spread out like wings to be able to turn the wheel in the available space.

"Go turnnag mor dat dwn der," blurts Patrick, waving his arms indicating a dirt track off to the right. Allen proceeds down this, the road getting more and more muddy and potholed. Presently they come to a vast mud puddle stretching a hundred feet in front of them.

"I'm not fucking driving through that. I'll never get outta there," declares Allen.

"Nom de got 50 acccs der what at see pice dat 580 to de sea, Nocho?"

"He says it's 50 acres that has some coastline, but you can see that the mangroves come all the way to here. The place is a swamp. No high ground. A good price. But shitty land. Which is not really land," explains Allen.

"I want to see. I want to see the shore," demands JC. The people untangle from the truck and JC and Rose step off the road into the jungle. Their feet sink into the mud and vegetation mix. Vines wrap around their ankles. Rotten sticks and spiky brush block their way. Into the dark of the woods, spiderwebs the size of a small car are festooned between the mangroves with multi-colored spiders sitting stoically in the middle waiting for a small bird to become entangled in their filmy 3D trap.

Rose is terrified, clinging to JC like a shield. They are wet to the knees and mosquitoes cloud around them, feasting on their bare tourist legs. JC pushes forward another fifty feet but can see no trace of the ocean, nor any way to navigate to it.

With a shriek, Rose slaps a thumb-sized fly who is carving a chunk of meat out of her soft leg flesh. Though she hits it directly, the jungle fly is unharmed and flies off in a wandering line.

"Shit. That really hurts. What the fuck was that? I ought to put some Neosporin on that," complains Rose.

"OK, this isn't working. No land, no road, no power. This is a nightmare. *Fuck it,*" says JC as he grabs Rose's hand and begins to tiptoe out of the claustrophobic snarl of brush and swamp.

Back in the truck, Patrick looks intently at the now swollen lump of bite on Rose's leg.

"Da hoose fyi done drill de worm inna dat woullie fine. Gotta abjorl with mi stuff bitt tabbaco ina owwel, gam el morteas, Worm de hondo granday."

"What's he saying, what's he saying?" asks Rose with more than a hint of desperation in her voice.

"He says you've been bit by a horse fly that laid a worm under your skin, and the only way to kill it is to stuff tobacco down the blowhole."

"What blowhole? What worm? No fucking way!"

"Way. You'll see. Or maybe you got lucky and only have the bite."

"Lucky? I'd like you to feel what this feels like," she whines,

"Many times. Many times. You don't see me wearing shorts in the jungle, do you?" answers Allen. "Some like to kill the worm first. Others like to get it drunk and pull it out. Personally, I like to pop 'em out with mass pressure."

"What?"

"You'll see."

"*Gama don gurblage road to de MoHo is wat dee mile to dat ribba plce nice. Here be to der quick thing. Muchamucha nice be at 400 zee achrage,*" announces Patrick.

After Allen manages to back up the crappy mud track and get turned around, he proceeds down a better-traveled road, though still torn up with water-filled potholes and ruts up to the axles.

The sides of the road are heaped with garbage. Household garbage. The filth is heaped up in places, and in others burned down to a stinking mess of oozed melted plastic.

"What the hell is this? Why is all this trash here? This is disgusting!" says Rose in grand indignity.

"This is the dump road. All the garbage of Punta Gorda is flung along here. The garbage truck dumps here. Everybody dumps here."

"Why don't they take care of this?" asks JC. Patrick and Allen turn towards him without answer. The answer to a local is obvious. Nobody gives a shit. What a stupid northerner's question.

The truck proceeds along, with the trash heaping higher on the sides of the track. In a jarring mile, they come to a branch road and a wider spot. Here the trash is heaped ten feet high and pushed into wind-rows. Twenty pound black-and-white buzzards hop between piles, their bald and puny-looking heads tearing at some rotten morsel or another. They do not care about the presence of humans, being more concerned that another of them will get a tasty scrap first.

"*De Janko Calle,*" says Black Patrick.

"Buzzard Road," interperates Allen.

Some Mayan women are digging in a few places in the trash, a filthy bag beside them being filled with some foul refuse.

"What are those women doing?" asks Rose in stupidity and innocence. All are quiet for a moment.

"Well, what? What's the big secret?" she insists.

"*Wanna gab de sunff. Shitfuk,*" retorts Partick.

"They are digging for food. They are starving and so poor, this is how they survive," says Allen in a low voice. He is ashamed of these people and the conditions that make them grub through the trash for a meal. Rose retracts in horror, embarrassed of her question, a look of dismay and sympathy crossing her face all at once.

"Oh, my God. That is horrible."

White guilt overcomes her and she crouches down between the big men, trying to disappear, trying not to show that her family controls 1% of the money supply on the planet. Knowing that the worst thing she ever ate was an avocado one day past perfect ripeness, while these people suck pasta from between handfuls of maggots.

The truck soon passes the main dumping zone, with only a few piles of rotting garbage strewn randomly along the way. The road is worse and more torn up, the bumps sending all four off the seat and the bigger guys hitting their heads on the truck's roof.

After a few miles, and what seems like an hour, they come into a two-acre clearing. On the far side of the clearing is the Monkey River. Deep and green, it rolls by beneath the ten-foot bank on this

side, and floods far into the forest on the other side where there is no bank. A small creek has made an inlet off the river on their side, but most of the land is elevated ten to fifteen feet above the river level. Downstream, the opening to the sea can be seen, the green maze opening to blue air. The river is over a hundred feet wide and discharges untold millions of gallons from the far inland Mayan Mountains.

"Now this is nice. This is what I'm talking about. Much can be done here. I like it!" rejoices JC.

"Oh, I just love it!" says Rose, slapping some busy mosquitoes on her arm.

"We can put the house here and the visitor cabins there," gestures JC expansively.

"Oh, this is just so nice!" says Rose.

"And the gator pens will be built there in the backwater. It's all here."

"*Padda wa gemda pouer heeaha*," states Patrick. "*Huuna?*"

"He says there are power lines coming out here. See those poles and wires there?" explains Allen. The poles are barely visible, being covered in vines and buried in scrubby trees. "This place was a landing to ship bananas out of about fifteen years ago. See, they built that bulkhead there along the river to load out of."

"Wow. That will come in handy too. Very cool. This is the place. The buck stops here! So how do we buy this place?" demands JC.

Patrick's eyes flash from side to side in his head, looking up as though he were watching a bird go back and forth just above him. His gaping grin has both an engaging aspect and a sinister smirk as if getting away with something.

"*Wi got nowgo mit whiha Patrick*," he says.

"Huh?"

"He says we have to go talk to White Patrick now, aye?" explains Allen.

To be continued in Cenacle | 108 | June 2019

* * * * *



Jimmy Heffernan**Brain Fog**

Grasping, holding on to absence
Feeling my way in calm reticence
Numbness, fearful uncertainty
Hell must be this eternally

Sharpness dulled atrociously
Frustration grows ferociously
Perception presently dissolves
Nothing, no one, can be here solved

Forget finding what appears right
Searching here one has no light
Better settle for what works
No muse exists that does here lurk

Sensitivity has died
Along with what one called one's pride
That soul who fancies himself:

Will be the one who falls victim
To the illusion of himself

* * *

Circular Reduction

The game of billiards
Is a wonderful game
But as a worldview
It is a tad lame

Reduce to the atom
Democritus cried
Random pulsations
Wholeness defied

It doesn't make sense
To call on an entity
From a unified field
That goes to infinity

To say that the agents
Of causal decree
Are not abstracted
Is circular, see?

Acts fundamental
Are themselves of the whole
Acts instrumental
Reduce . . . to the soul?

* * *

Chop Wood and Carry Water

We find ourselves, it is true
In many situations
We're all in different spots, really
With many ranks and stations

But is he better off, the one
Who's gotten all the money?
Happiness is not a switch
"Good" lives may not be sunny

Even those who have the most
Can suffer the most, too
We are on our own, it seems
In life, all the way through

In the end it's Zen, in fact
To point us toward contentment
To chop wood and carry water
Without any resentment

If you can see the truth in this
It would indeed behoove you
Life is not a game at root
So let the spirit move you

* * *

Complex Simplicity

In the halls of the great souls
 The giants of science
 There is one word spoken
 The word is “elegance”

The presumption, perhaps fallacious
 Is that Nature is comprehensible
 And that we can comprehend Her
 And that She sings to us

Indeed, what is considered beautiful?
 That which is simple.
 Is this a plea for the aforementioned elegance?
 Or merely the betrayal of fools?

Inside of the flowing, unfolding implicate
 Is beauty, serenity, knowledge
 One could call its core simple
 But then one would be dismissing the quality of the tapestry

You see,
 The universe is either straightforward or it isn't
 Our insistence upon its compatibility with human minds
 Is a desperate faith

Like a language, Nature combines discrete elements
 Into various meanings and structures
 And while the dynamics may have simple rules
 Infinities can be created

So perhaps a dual principle becomes necessary
 We have a fundamental whose resplendence is yet a mystery
 And we have the capacity for infinite permutation
 Are these the vows of being and becoming?

* * *

Desert Ruin

Out here, this is Indian land
Sacred land

The Cavalry visited this place
Desolate, empty now

A bridge to nowhere, a wheel
How did they get here and why

The desert hare looks on
Uninterested

The rattlesnake looks on
Over toward the hare

And this place, uncaring
Stretches to infinity

Infinity is the only place
You'd find a scene as this

These precious pearls of being, left alone
Are what make living possible

Without them not to know about
We'd have nothing

* * * * *



Bags End News
No. 352 January 16, 2010
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Wat Nekt?

That nektly iz mah kwestyun
dear readers. Nowe I am notorif
sterr inn the sky butt I dont think
itz ortr too wack around nowing
mor than learning.

Still, ney I waz wawking around
& I waz nott learning or nowing eethr.
I felt lik sumwun els with atsh
baee & brayberz.

I cood nott go bakkk befor awl
mah eksperiences with Lery in
Dreemland.

I wantid too Kum hap. too shoe
I cood. Too mak shur itt waz stil
heer.

Then, waz a butt nowe.
Sheela Bunny opind wun sleecee
perpek iye. inn mah direkshun.

Bags End News
No. 353 May 28, 2010
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Best I Cann Saye,,,

Wheer I dream at nit iz
called thee Creecher Common
an heest I cann saye iz
that most of thees gus an
a lot lesss crazey than mah
fokks inn Bagzand or elss
sum othr kind of crazee that
looks lik nissness but serpriz.
haha iznt

A leed creecher iz a gu
whoo iz tellowz wish too represent
them. Similar tellowz, mind
ye lik wun for dukkys & wun
for pin cozz & so on.

A leed leed creecher is thee
fest among gus. Not a king lik
Sheela out sorts. kinda. Eksaktlay

Bags End News
No. 354 September 11, 2010
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Jiggering Up a Blann

For a longg tins yer old pal Algernon
haz beene jiggering too find hiz
see leaz for rithin mah nuwez papr
reguler agen. Isthinkk itt ued too
bee simpr wen wun of thee bigg
gus inn Bagzand wood skeem hee
an ideer & I woad gett drappeddalong
& rit mah waye thoo it.

Thee storre gott stranpr wen I
waz in Dreemland for a long
tin & then I dis covrd thee
Creecher Common an thee othr
sid of Dreemland. Then gus an
thee wun sid & thee othr sid
met & it waz Okaye butt I stil
felt no beegel groov too go
with.

Bags End News
No. 355 September 18, 2010
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Mor of Crisys' Storee

Mah deenreefz, I hav
nown mah trend princess Crisys
of Impeanna a long tin butt
itt iz onlee nowe that shee
iz telling me thupz that
happened a long tins ago that
eksplain nowe abtitt butt also
mak mee seey everything nuwe
to.

Shee told mee too go seey
Loriy Bunny & rit up mah nuwe
papr. I did & theer waz no
cann tag or letters bekauz I
sed to Loriy aqested her spktokks
& lookd at meed & noed. & Ok
Algernon, she sed in her niss &
emort gy voyz.

Algernon Beagle



Bags End Book #12: What Is Imagianna?

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf>

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

What Next?

That really is mah question, Dear Readers. Now I am no bright star in the sky, but I don't think it's better to walk around knowing more than learning.

Still, here I was, walking around & I was not learning or knowing either. I felt like someone else with mah bodybone & brainbone.

I could not go back before all mah experiences with my friend Larry the Spider in Dreamland, that I talked about in mah Bags End Book called Algernon Beagle Wakes Up!

I wanted to come home to Bags End to show I could. To make sure it was still here.

There was a but now.

Sheila Bunny opened one sleepy purple eye in mah direction.
 "What, Beagle?"
 "What do you think of all I told you about Dreamland? In mah long long story?"
 "It was long, long."
 "That's all?"
 "I'm glad you're back."
 "I don't know if I can stay."
 Now 2 purple eyes.
 "Maybe I come & go."
 "Why go?"
 "Maybe it's what I do now."
 "Now?"
 I reached down hard now 4or some new words or a better train of the usual ones.
 "Yes. Now." Wow, not many.
 "OK," she grumbled. "Keep in touch." Then she slept.
 I could have asked 4or more, or been disappointed, but the thing I think I have learned is that a storm in mah heart doesn't mean rain on your head. Something like that.
 Mostly I had to figger this out slowly, at the pace of mah own brainbone's crawly walk.
 Mah first idear was to see what it was like not to be on the run or in the middle of some crazy story.
 Go to Mister Owl's Bags End School. Sleep in mah own bed. That's what I said to mahself, like I was building a 10-part mountain, not doing what I used to do all the time with no instructions.
 The next morning, Mr. Owl was glad to see me at my school desk. Hm.
 "You're early, Algernon. It's not time for class."
 "I know. But I have to ask questions that I don't know will fit in class."
 Mister Owl adjusted his little smart guy spectacles & nodded. I remembered he is good at teaching & listening both. I think I needed both.
 "What is Bags End 4or?"
 "4or?"
 "I know it sounds like words pretending to be a question but not really one."
 He laughed & then listened some more.
 "I used to understand something by not knowing I didn't know it."
 He nodded.
 "But now I know I don't know," I finished, wondering who was talking smart guy riddles with mah simple fella's tongue.
 Mister Owl talked now which was good because I had none left.
 "It's better to have some questions than no questions."
 I nodded & listened.
 "There's always been more to Bags End than most of us know."
 "Hmm," I said briefly.
 "I read your Dreamland stories with great interest."
 "O, shucks!" said me, in case that was a compliment.
 Mister Owl laughed again & I liked his laugh a lot. Smart & nice.
 "I think what you found out was that Bags End goes in more directions than you knew. Higher & lower, but also deeper in & further out."
 "You mean Dreamland, right?" I asked, worrying I was spending out mah meager smarts pretty quick.

Mister Owl nodded. "You could say Imagianna is out more & you could say Dreamland is in more."

"But I got to Dreamland by going through Imagianna!"

Mister Owl nodded. "The world is like that the more you learn about it."

I hmmm'd inside mah head so not to slow his talk. But he was quiet again.

Then he nodded & talked some more. "It's sort of like a game. All this," & he pointed all around us with his wing.

"A game?" I repeated, but not like I knowed what was what.

"A serious game."

"O."

"And nobody knows the rules."

"O."

"And nobody knows 4or sure it is a game or how anyone wins or loses."

I must have looked buried in short hard words because he smiled & stopped.

But, wait. I had a thought. I was surprised, but there it was.

"A game like checkers?"

He nodded slightly. OK, Beagle, try harder.

"But harder?"

He smiled.

I thinked. "Sheila plays checkers with Godd the small pink bear. So Godd likes games. Is this all Godd's game?"

"I don't know."

"Does Godd know?"

"Maybe."

Hmm. O. Both didn't work.

Mister Owl thinked some more & tried again. "This isn't my first home, Algernon."

"O."

"I came to Bags End from other places."

"You did?"

He nodded.

"We all live many lifetimes."

This sounded like the kind of smart guy talk that would soon leave me in the dust.

He shooked his head. "Listen. I think what's hard for you is figgering out what to do with the many worlds you now know. How they don't fit yet & make an easy picture."

I nodded. These words made sense & I hoped they would go on.

"Bags End is your home in a way nowhere else could be. Not Imagianna, not Dreamland. Not the place where your friends the Creatures live. Not even Connecticut or other places in Miss Chris's & Ramie's world."

I nodded again but really listening. Brainbone smoking.

"It could be you live in more than one place 4or awhile."

"How?"

"You know how."

"You mean dreaming?"

"Dreaming. And waking too."

Hm.

Mister Owl patted me nicely on mah 4orehead. "Go."

"Where? I came to school like I am supposed to, & didn't 4or a long time!"

He shook his head. "Your homework is to go & figger this out, & then come back & report to me & others."

O great. Homework. Could be worse.

He laughed again. "In Bags End News, of course."

I laughed too. This made it easier.

So then I finally nodded & went. I was gone be4ore anyone else showed up to school.

Gosh, I am still doing this . . . whatever it is. Only now others know too. I guess I better figger it out a lot better that I know now!

Best I Can Say . . .

Where I dream at night is called the Creature Common & best I can say is that most of their guys are a lot less crazy than mah own folks in Bags End, or else some other kind of crazy that looks like niceness but, surprise! ha! isn't!

I have learned that a Lead Creature is a guy who his fellows wish to represent them. Similar fellows, mind you, like one for Duckees & one for Pine Cones & so on.

A Lead Lead Creature is the first among guys. Not a King like Sheila wishes, but sorta kinda. Exactly like Sheila if she was someone else totally. Um. Yah.

The Lead Lead Creature is Threshold, a nice little pup with a serious look. He has pretty brown eyes & a handsome mug. Very polite. Does not talk much.

None of these guys talk a lot but I understand them. I think this took awhile.

I think of these Creature, mah crazy Bags End folks, & you Dear Readers, wherever you are, as part of the same bigger thing. And I think that includes Imagianna too, & Miss Chris & Ramie in Connecticut.

I tried to think of which way to start telling this story. I mean, I could keep telling about everybody I meeted, or I could tell one of the things that happened. But I kept thinking that telling about more Creatures would be good.

And I still don't quite know if this is the right way, but I will tell next about a fella named MeZmer, who is a White Bunny.

See, I thinked I already knowed all the Bunnys I would get to know but, ha! no. I meeted MeZmer. I admire her hoppings, I must say. And by saying this, I almost fell into a story but not yet. Anyway, MeZmer, being a Bunny, is very cute & pats mah nozebone most politely.

Then there is this fella named Bauer. He is a slyly smiling black-&-white pandy bear. I have seen some guys dance in mah days, but this Bauer takes the cake with his impressive slidings. O! Cake! Yuk! He wears a rakish bowtie too. Rakish means "O Wow," with a chuckle.

Another impressive fellow is called Pirth who is purple & furry but I don't know which kind of Creature he is. He's a dancer too, but he dances another way from Bauer. More jumping, less sliding. He also has a nice bow in his head's fur, & he dances with two ribbons.

Pirth has a twin sister name Beamer, who looks part Bear & part Bee, & she loves Pirth, & they are twins in part by dancings. Bauer is not a twin to them, although I guess he could be.

Another guy I met is named Jacoby. He is a monkey fella with a friendly smile. And boy howdy! Can he jump! They often call him Jumping Jacoby. Very polite too.

There there are these two little blue-eyed Kitties whose names are the same but talked different. Johnny with a J sound, & Johnny with a Y sound. They might be twins too, but I don't know & they like licking fellas friendly more than explaining in words. But that's OK, really.

Now I have to interrupt mah easy tellings to say that pending trouble nears. It has to do with hopping. Since I have been living in Bags End by wake & the Creature Common by sleep, I sometimes talk about one while in the other.

Bags End guys showed mostly no interest in the Creature Common. But then I made the mistake one day in Sheila's Throne Room of talking to her about MeZmer hopping in the Creature Common.

"Who hops there?" she demanded to know.

"Well," I said, without letting mah brainbone think about the sure trouble to come. "MeZmer hops really good."

"Better than your King?"

I began to talk but then Sheils stopped me & said, "Consider the certain chance of your demise before answering, Beagle."

Good advice. "Nobody hops better than you, Sheila."

This didn't work. She hopped from her Throne right up close to mah usual resting place on the floor.

"I demand a Royal Hop-Off!" she cried.

"Um-um?" I stuttered.

"I will prove my superiority to any foreign Bunny near or far!" she declared.

O boy! A hopping war. I tried to back quietly out of the room, but she out-tricked me.

"Tell that Bunny I am coming & will defeat her on her own home turf!"

"I don't think there's any turf there, Sheila," I said hopelessly. But she just stared & pointed me out of her Throne Room.

Now I found mahself stuck in a new story when I had been happily describing Creatures.

What to do, what to do, Dear Readers? Down to every last one of mah Beagle bones, I didn't like the idear of a Royal Hop-Off.

So I went to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch to sit & think this over. Then I felled asleep, & I was in the Creature Common, just like that.

And there was MeZmer looking at me! This dreaming stuff is a little crazy.

I said, "Hi, fella," & MeZmer smiled her charming smile.

I tried to gather mah best words.

"I live in Bags End when I am awake," I explained for no reason since she knows that.

"Anyway, mah 'dopted sister Sheila is sort of nuts about being the best Bunny around & when I said you're a good hopper too, she went crazy & wants a Royal Hop-Off!" I explained faster & faster till I stopped of words.

MeZmer nodded & made to sleep with me back to Bags End where she would be sleeping & I would be awake. Parse that one, ya egghead guys!

"No, but!" I protested, but now we were back in Bags End, hopping & walking, me very reluctantly, to Sheila's Throne Room.

This was the first meeting of Bunnys from Bags End & the Creature Common. I thought I would have to introduce them with all due protocols, which are like politeness dressed up good in words & doings.

No, sir. MeZmer hopped right up to Sheila Bunny in her Throne & they looked each over good.

No words. Just Sheila's magickal purple eyes & MeZmer's strangely glowing ones. On & on they looked.

Finally, Sheila nodded & hopped off her Throne. She & MeZmer hopped side by side right out of the Throne Room, & I had to run fast to keep up! Down level after level of Bag End I chased.

"Hey! Where are you going?" I cried to no answer, & they got so far ahead of me I lost them.

Figgering Up a Plan

For a long time, your old pal Algernon has been trying to find mah sea legs for writing my newspaper regular again. I think it used to be simpler when one of the big guys in Bags End would scheme up an idear, & I would get dragged along, & I would write mah way through it.

The story got stranger when I was in Dreamland for a long time, & then I discovered the Creature Common on the other side of Dreamland. Then, not so long ago, guys on the one side & the other side met, like I tolded about with Sheila Bunny & MeZmer, but I still felt no Beagle groove to go with.

This is what I have learned, Dear Readers: I could go on without writing mah newspaper, but I don't want to. And I don't think Bags End is good without mah newspaper. Nobody does what I do.

Maybe that's part of why Mister Owl sent me off to figger all this out instead of going back to Bags End School. Sort of introducing MeZmer to Sheila wasn't figgering anything out really, but I did kind of like that they finally met, & they settled any dispute they might have had through, um, staring & hopping off together.

But I still had the hard thing to work over. What do I do now?

That's the question I brung to mah good friend Princess Crissy in Imagianna. The way there is not far. Find the right hallway, & the right door, & go on through.

So I did. What was strange was that her dear friend Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, did not greet me in his formal polite way. This takes time but it's his way, & I like him.

Crissy answered the door of her Castle. "Algernon!" she said all happy. I never get tired of her happy.

"Hi, Crissy! Where is Boop?"

"He had to go visit one of his relatives," Crissy said, all mysteriously.

"O," sayeth me as we walked into her Throne Room. Crissy slouched down in her Throne almost Sheila Bunny-like, but she didn't crunch a carrot (O! Yuk!) or play a jazz record.

So I talked what was on mah mind. Crissy listened good & nodded & smiled like she does.

"You want your Beagle groove & don't know about it right now," she said, in just the right number of words.

I nodded.

"Old grooves won't do," she said some more.

"Um," I said, "No. And nobody is making me, um, write in old grooves, but I don't know the new one yet. It's hard," I said, feeling dummer than ever.

Crissy smiled her special smile for me that makes me happy in mah very

bones. "Do you know how I came to live here in Imagianna?"

Um, no. "Um, no," I then said out loud.

"I didn't start here," Crissy said.

Hm. Just like Mister Owl told me that he didn't start in Bags End. "We all live many lifetimes," he had said, though I didn't know if those words mattered to this Crissy telling. I decided to ask an easier question.

"Where did you start?"

Crissy leaned back in her Throne & closed her eyes.

"Well, it wasn't a fantasyland where I started," she said.

Hm, again. I listened with both mah earbones, & wished for more too.

"And you were with me, Algernon," she smiled.

"Um?" I said out loud.

"And Boop too," she said.

Well, OK. But. "Crissy, I don't remember."

"Well, it was a long time ago."

"Yes, but I don't remember be4ore Bags End except some sad memories of mah Mommy Beagle in Peoria."

"Be4ore that," she said.

"Be4ore?"

"It's a strange story, Algernon."

"But I don't remember. And you never told me."

"Well, Bags End is more interesting than all that ever was."

"But you're telling me now," I said, trying to keep up.

"Well, it matters now."

"OK."

I rested mah headbone on Crissy's lap, & she talked, & it got stranger, & I guess she maybe used her magick a little cuz it was like a dream but kinda not. I saw pictures like I was in them, & her words changed them as she talked. Um.

"We lived in a one room apartment in a city. It was small but we were happy. I was older then. I had a job & had to leave you both every morning. But I put you 2 together in the window to watch the sky & the cars & the people go by. Then I came home later & told you about my day."

I could see us in the window, watching the day & waiting 4or her to return.

"Then one day I came home early, & I was sad, & I didn't like to say why."

I almost remembered that.

"I lost my job. It was terrible. I was very afraid."

She was too. She had a hard time telling us.

"Anyway, every Saturday the 3 of us would go to the movies. I would sit with you on my lap."

Hm.

"So I brought us one more time cuz I got paid one more time."

It was a sad story whether I remembered it or not.

"That night, we all fell asleep like usual in my bed, & I had a dream."

Ut-o.

"And the dream told me what to do. That's when I brought you to your Mommy Beagle, & you stayed with her & 4orgot about me."

"But how?"

"You had to. I did it. Or you would have been too sad to go."

Crissy looks really sad. "I sorta kept track of you until you got to Bags End. Then I knew you would be OK."

"But where did you & Boop go?"





"Well, we ended up here eventually."

"But why did I have to leave you?"

"That was the deal in the dream. With Benny."

O. Him. Benny Big Dreams is this strange tricky oneiroautical fellow. That means that he travels in dreams. Sometimes helps, sometimes his tricks overflow.

"I didn't really understand it, but I think he did it to make me have to trust him. He promised you would be OK, & I would see you again."

Hm.

Now she smiled her Crissy smile again. "And here we are. Except Boop, who is on his trip."

"But you said this story matters now?"

"Yes, I think so."

"How?"

"Well, I was afraid when things changed, when I lost my job, when I had to not been with you. It was OK tho. And you said you don't know how to do your newspaper right now, but I think that will be OK too. Sometimes you have to trust & keep trudging along, not knowing."

I nodded.

"There's more," she said.

"More?"

"Yes. Lots more."

O.

"Go find Lori Bunny & make your newspaper's new issue about this story. And come back soon 4or more!"

So I hurried back to Bags End!

More of Crissy's Story

Deer Readers, I have known mah friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna 4or a long time, but it is only now that she has been telling things that happened a long time ago that explain now a lot but also make me see everything new too.

She told me to go see Lori Bunny to write up my newspaper's new issue about her story, & I did. Lori helped me get it writed up & shared around like she always does.

So I came back again to see Princess Crissy & resume mah place near her Throne to listen, but she was outside under a big oak tree, & smiled, & we stayed here.

"Where were we?"

"You said there is more."

"Well, yes, you see it got kind of bad after I made sure you were safe with your Mommy Beagle."

I nodded but not a word.

She talked slower. "I don't remember every detail but, really, it came down to how far I wanted to go."

"Go?"

"Benny said he could help me but not where I was. I had to be closer to him."

"Um?"

"I had to give up something."

"What, Crissy?"

"A part of me. I had to be willing to leave my world."

"O." Um.

"We made a kind of deal. That's how I came here. It's not where I am from but it's not a fantasyland like Bags End, full of fun & trouble. Only near."

Hmm.

"OK, is this your prison? I thought it was nice!" Suddenly mah brainbone told me to be ready to be upset & cry, but not yet.

"No, Algernon, this is better. Back there we were in danger. It had its beauties, but it was dangerous & unstable."

"O."

"My place here is kind of a middle place between there & Bags End & other kinds of places we love."

"O."

"It's how Bags End in Connecticut looks like 3 laundry bags piled on top of each other, but inside is this big apartment building, with no top or bottom & all the rest."

"O."

"Imagianna is how it holds together."

"Um."

"Yes, Algernon?"

"Well, I don't really understand. How can a place be like glue?"

Crissy laughed. Then she started telling another story entirely.

"When I was little, there were strange things that I guess I forgot about later."

"What things, Crissy?"

"Well, there was a hole in the wall of my bedroom, but only when I was asleep."

I almost said "Um?" but I had been a lot so I pushed mah saggy old brainbone for more.

"What was in it?" I asked almost smart-guy-like, & afraid mah brainbone would crack if I kept trying. Ha! Beagle humor.

"Well, that is what was funny, because if I was awake I could not have gone into it. I mean I knew where it was along my bedroom wall, & how high. But not there."

"What was in it?"

Crissy smiled. "Well, Boop lived here."

"Really?"

"It was a big place but he lived there."

"Is that where he is now to visit his relatives?" I remembered & cogitated like "smart" is mah middle name, which it is not.

Crissy looked sad, which she usually doesn't, & mah heartbone bent.

"He has an uncle & that's who he went to see. His uncle is sick."

"O."

"I think he will be OK."

I thought some more because it's like I was forgetting things, listening about other things.

"You met Boop in dreams?"

"Well, I dreamed he lived through the hole in my bedroom wall, & he dreamed I would come & visit him."

"Did you dream me?" I asked, not knowing if I wanted yes or no.

"Well, that's a later story. You like them in a row?" she smiled.

I nodded. "Maybe it's like counting or 123s or ABZs. Easier to remember." She nodded.

"Well, I was small & I didn't know what people-folks say about holes in the walls you can only see in dreams."

"What do they say?"

"That dreams aren't real. Only things you can know with your five senses are real. And people-folks are the most important real of all."

"O. Um."

Crissy nodded.

"I got told that later & I think I believed it 4or awhile. Because people told me with smiles, & I wanted them to like me."

"Sounds like a bad deal somehow," I said, but I didn't really know much more than that.

"So I had to learn that I could not get into the hole in my bedroom wall anymore in my dreams. It wasn't real."

I nodded to let her talk more.

"I tried & tried & it was not there, & then I 4orgot to believe it was there."

Nod.

"But I never stopped being sad because my friend Boop lived in there, & there was so much to see."

"So how did you start again?"

"He came to me."

"He did?"

"He was sad too & he told his uncle, & his uncle said Boop would have to go to me."

"How did he do that?"

"I was with my friend in a store, & there he was on a shelf."

"Did he say hi?"

"No. He looked like a regular toy turtle, but I saw him, & I got him, & I brought him home."

"Did he talk then?"

"No, not yet. But I slept with him in my arms, & we dreamed each other like we used to."

"O!"

"He told me I could have him 4or real, but I had to choose to. He said using your imagination to create something is like turning on an unknown part of the Universe. It was always there, but nobody knowed about it."

"Boop said that?"

Crissy smiled. "Yes, Algernon, & more. But that's enough for this time. Go to see Lori Bunny & get your newspaper made, & come back to see me again 4or more soon!"

So I runned!

What Imagianna Is (Part 1)

Soon I went to see Crissy to hear more of her strange story, & this time we sat closely together in a field of mah friends the Weedz!

"YAYY ALGERNON!" they yelled because they made me their King 4or defending them against dum guys like Betsy Bunny Pillow.

"O, shucks!" cried me. Then I had a bright idear. "Hey, Weedz, I want you to yayy Princess Crissy!"

And they did, sort of. They yelled, "Yayy! Crispest Princy!" And Crissy

Bags End News
 No. 206 September 25, 2010
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

What Imageanna Iz Part 1!

My deer friend Princess Crissy
 an Crisy from Imageanna was
 bin telling me a krazy tip
 storee ut her youth & howe shee
 kam too liv in Imageanna weez
 I hav know her for so long.

Both shee told me we would
 each vint wege befor to in them
 pair store weest bak & bak to
 her childa & howe shee met
 her friend Boop in dreamz art
 from lawst night until latr.

So I went too seey Crisy
 too hear mor of her sto
 & thiss im wee, sap
 im g-told utt weedz
 my Algernon!

Bags End News
 No. 207 October 3, 2010
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

What Imageanna Iz Part 2

Yur old pal Algernon is a
 happy lotta theez natiz bekoz
 I am bin ritng Mah howz pair
 open lik old house, ritng up thez
 long storee with quid friend Princess
 Crisy has bin telling me. About her,
 my historee with it ternz out
 involv me, an her bestus ndy
 Boop both ut uss.

Thiss im wen I
 vint her shee bring a
 herin Sept Kuum. Ut a
 about it befor.

Insid, thez rum
 perpe tied & thers was
 on the wall.
 Thiss iz sort of

Bags End News

DOUBLE ISSUE!
 No. 300-301 October 9-16, 2010
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Wat Imageanna Iz (Grand Finale)

Yur old pal Algernon went
 looking for sett kiz beezel here
 remember the jae bak & utt weez
 Mah deer friend Princess Crisy
 ut Imageanna whoo has bin
 helpin me too doo thiss.

Shee has bin telling me &
 I hav bin ritng down for Mah
 deer friends thez storee ut um
 mee & her & Boop befor thez
 waz a krazend. An thez
 waz a lot ut it too rit down!

I waz thinking about all
 shee sed befor going bak too
 seey her for mor. I waz inn
 King Sheilas Thron Kuum an

laughed & laughed so it was OK. But her name is Crissy. Then she started telling more story.

"Boop wanted me to know that I couldn't halfway be his waking friend. That it meant a different way of looking at things."

"What way?"

"That people-folks weren't all that important over everyone else. And dreams are real. And what we imagine is as important as what we do."

"Um?"

Crissy smiled. "You know that because you are a Creature from the imagination. People-folks are too but they don't think like that. They think the world was made 4or them, & now they are in charge. And that there's only one world anyway."

"Hm."

"Yes, hm. And even as their world changes in ways they don't understand, & not all by their simple doing, they still keep themselves apart."

"Why, Crissy?"

"It's hard to be people-folks."

"O. Why?"

"I don't know." She looked sad so I talked some more.

"So you chose Boop?"

"Of course! I was so glad to have him."

I nodded.

"Did you go back through the hole in your bedroom wall?"

Crissy shooked her head. "Not exactly. Mostly, we talked on my bed. I would read to him from my schoolbooks sometimes."

"I didn't know you goed to school, Crissy!"

She smiled. "I did 4or awhile. It was easy & hard. I could remember things I read easy, but I didn't like a lot of it."

"Because it was all about people-folks?"

"Mostly. And I didn't know how to tell what I knew. I had lost my best friend & found him again. I met him in our dreams & now he was with me. When we talked, I could hear him in my head. All this was real to me. It was what I did with my nights. I was with Boop. But other people-folks would have said 'he isn't real & you need to grow up soon.' If I had told them."

"You didn't?"

"I told one person. He listened & he nodded. Then he had to go."

"O."

"I was sad but I knew he believed me & so it was possible 4or me to meet more people-folks who did."

"Were you lonely with no people-folks friends?"

"I wanted them to understand me. I wasn't making up these idears. I was just learning them as I went along."

I nodded.

"I even started to write stories."

"Stories?"

Crissy smiled big this time. "On your rite-typer, Algernon."

"Mine?"

"Back then it was mine, & I used it to write stories."

I was amazed.

"Boop helped me. They were about what I had seen in that hole in my bedroom wall."

"Did people-folks read your stories?"

"Yes! They liked them. But they thought I made them up."

"Why would you do that if you had good true stories to tell?" I

demanded.

Crissy laughed. "Anyway, they kept asking me 4or more but I stopped."

"Is that why you lost your job, Crissy?"

"No, that was later on when I had you & Boop."

"How did you get me?" I hoped it was time 4or that part of her story.

"Well, I dreamed about your Mommy Beagle."

"Really?"

"She asked me to take care of you."

"Why?"

"She had to take care of some things."

"O."

"But I woke up & me nor Boop knew where you were."

I nodded, hoping her telling would not stop.

"I looked in many places 4or you. In stores & parks & in streets. Mommy Beagle had said to hurry. Then I had an idear."

"What was it, Crissy?"

"Well, mah idear was to write one more story in which I was looking 4or you because of my dream, & I found you in the end."

"Where did you find me, Crissy?"

"I wrote that I dreamed I would find you in my arms with Boop when I finished writing the story & woke up."

"O!"

"And there you were!"

Crissy hugged me, & the Weedz, who I guessed are good listeners, cheered her & cheered me, & then sort of cheered 4or everything, since they were right now feeling all happy & not in danger from lawnmowers or crazed Pillows 4or awhile.

I was guessing that was all the story I would be getting this time, & I was pretty happy with it anyway.

"There's more, Algernon."

"More?"

"Always more. Like, how did I meet Miss Chris? Or Sheila Bunny? And what about Bags End & the Creature Common?"

I nodded.

"Some of it already happened, like the stories I have been telling you. But some of it will happen next."

"Like the story of you telling the stories."

She smiled. "But I will tell you more next time."

I nodded. And went along mah way back to Bags End, to find Lori Bunny & write up a new issue of mah newspaper to tell all of this.

What Imagianna Is (Part 2)

Your old pal Algernon is a happy fella these days because I am writing mah newspaper again like the old days, writing up the long story mah good friend Princess Crissy has been telling me. About her, um, history, which it turns out involves me & her bestus buddy Boop, both of us.

This time when I went to visit her, she brung me to her Secret Room, which I didn't know about be4ore.

Inside, the room was sort of purple lights & there were funny pictures on the wall.

"This is sort of like my own Milne's Porch," Crissy said with that tricky smile of hers I like so much.

We sat together on these funny cushions &, after awhile of being nicely quiet, Crissy began to *hmmm*, & that was nice too.

Then I think the *hmmms* turned to words after awhile.

"You were different when I first met you, Algernon."

"I was?"

"Well, you didn't write your own newspaper."

"O. Um. No rite-typer. And I guess no Bags End."

"No. You were afraid a lot."

"I wished I remembered all this better, Crissy."

"Look into the darkness. Deep into it."

I did & I watched as the darkness changed & got, um, deeper. Like I was walking into it. Like being inside a TV show I was watching.

Crissy was still next to me so that was OK.

I saw her little home with me & Boop in it. I saw mah younger self but he could not see me. Probably 4or the best.

"You missed your Mommy Beagle. You were scared when I had to go in the day."

I nodded.

"I had to protect you better than I could. You needed a different kind of home than this."

"O," I said, feeling sad & sorry all over again for mah scaredness.

"You weren't there when Bags End began."

"I wasn't?"

"No. There were only a few. You came a little while later."

"How did I get there?"

"Well, Ramie would find Bags End friends in different places."

"Ramie found me?"

"He found you in a toy store & he brung you along with him."

"To Sheila & Miss Chris?"

"They took you in & then you had a really safe home."

"Were you sad, Crissy?"

"I promised I would see you again. I promised & I did."

"That's true."

Crissy stopped there.

"That's all 4or this time."

I blinked cuz I didn't know any smarter words than um and O.

"Next time will be the Grand Finally like you have sometimes!"

"O! I like those!"

"So go write up this short issue & come back 4or that next time."

I hugged Crissy & left her Secret Room, & went back to Bags End to make a new skinny issue of mah newspaper. Next time will be the Grand Finally & I think I will be happy & relieved both.

What Imagianna Is (Grand Finally!)

Your old pal Algernon went looking to get his beagleboy journalist mojo back, & it was mah dear friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna who has been helping me to do this.

She has been telling me & I have been writing down for your Dear

Readers the story of, um, me & her & Boop be4ore there was a Bags End. And there was a lot of it to write down!

I was thinking about all she said be4ore going back to see her in Imagianna 4or more. It was in would-be King Sheila's Throne Room on mah resting matt near her Thone. Sheila was slouched down in her Throne, like usual, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & playing a little Miles Davis jazz music on her fonograph.

I wanted to ask her more about her hoppings with MeZmer, & was trying to figure out how to ask without the grouchy yelling in reply when suddenly she said to me, "Crissy gave me that fonograph, a long time ago."

"She did?"

Sheila didn't talk but listened instead to Miles play his trumpet. He always sounds to me like he has this big idea & he plays his trumpet really good to tell about it.

"She came to see that you were doing OK. And she knowed I like Miles & Trayne & Bird & Dizzy."

Ha! Those crazy jazz guy names!

"So she brought me her fonograph & her records. I said, 'what are you going to do for music?' & she smiled at me & said, 'I will listen when I visit here.' Then she said, 'anyway, I have them all memorized in my heart.'"

I thinkd Sheila would say more but she thrashed around a bit & took her nap right there & then. O. I figgered I would go see Crissy now.

I found her in her own Throne Room, slouched down in her Throne, looking bored. She had on her blue jeans underneath her princess dress.

She smiled happy to see me.

"No Boop yet?"

"He sent me a postcard!" She took out this card & read it to me: "Greetings, Noble Princess! My travels are nearly complete. The prognosis 4or my relative is a good one. Remember to do your Princess exercises! Your loving & loyal Subject, Boop."

"Speak regular English, fella," I gruttered, oops!, out loud.

"He says his uncle is getting better & he will be home soon!"

"O." Crissy speaks really good regular English.

"A lot of what happens in life is by luck," she said next.

I nodded.

"But some of it is by taking a chance in hand."

I nodded again, less so.

"When Boop & I came here, this place didn't have a name. Or a Castle. And I was not a Princess."

"Really?"

"Boop & I read a lot of storybooks & he told me that I should be a Princess, & live in a Castle, & he would be my humble & loyal servant."

"But, um--"

"How did we get here? Where did this Castle come from?"

I nodded.

"Bags End was new & it needed a Guardian. I wasn't doing very well where I was. I made a choice to come here & leave that world behind."

"Behind?"

"I can't go back where I am from to live again. Boop & I came here on our own, & then the Castle came. And then we lived here."

"O." But not really. This was too short 4or the Grand Finally like she promised.

We were quiet then. I wasn't sure if I was waiting or not.

Then suddenly I talked. "Sheila told me you gave her your fonograph."

Crissy got all happy again. "Sheila loves jazz so much!"
 "Did you make Bags End?" It seemed like a strange question, but now that I had asked it, it seemed like Crissy had been waiting for it.

"I helped."

"How, Crissy?"

"Remember I told you I would write stories?"

"Until you stopped."

"Well, I didn't stop completely. I just stopped showing them around." Hm. Now this sounded more like a Grand Finally to me.

Crissy stood up strangely & began to walk around. "I had idears of things. Some of them I dreamed. Some of them I wasn't sure about. Some of them were inspired by books. So I helped but I wasn't close enough."

"Close enough?"

"When you dream about a place, you can wake up. When you write about a place, you can close the book."

I nodded.

"I knew Bags End was real & somehow I had helped make it real. But it was not close enough."

"Why didn't you move there? Everybody would love to have you come," I said, all friendly. I guessed the answer would be some kind of hard.

"I couldn't. It would not work. I could change things like nobody else could. I would be like Godd."

"The small pink bear?"

"But Godd doesn't live in Bags End?"

"No, he just visits sometimes."

"That's better."

"Are you like Godd, Crissy?"

She laughed. "No. Godd is from a different angle on things."

"O," I said, really wishing I knowed more words to talk mah brainbone.

"Anyway, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be nearer than a dream or a book, but not living there & ruin it."

I would have said she could never ruin nothing, but I guessed she would be stubborn.

"So you, um, made Imagianna?"

"It was a compromise. But I could not go back where I came from to live."

I nodded.

"Anyway, I didn't want to go back."

"Did you write more stories about Bags End?"

"No. It was different. I wasn't interested so much anymore."

"O."

"So I gave my rite-typer to you, & Lori said you & she could do a newspaper about all the crazy things that happen in Bags End."

"O!" I said, all happy. "But I don't really write English too fancy."

"English is best when it's plain & true as you can," Crissy said, smiling.

I nodded.

Then we were all talked out & had a good nap. Nothing like it.

Later on, I asked if there was more to the story.

"Well, most of it you already know."

"Is being the Guardian a hard thing to do?"

She shook her head. "It's just a name. Bags End runs itself."

I nodded. Sort of.

"Easier than being a Princess!" she laughed.

I supposed I had my mojo back as much as I could. I mean, now I could

see how what I do is part of this long story I didn't know too good. I am lucky to write mah newspaper way more than I thought.

Then I remembered. "What about mah long lost Mommy Beagle?"

Crissy looked me serious. "I think she will be back one day, Algernon."

Then mah brainbone had a really big idear, too big really, but I tried.

"Can you write a story about how she comes back?"

She looked at me, shocked, but not mad. "I don't know. I would have to think about it 4or awhile."

"You can borrow the rite-typer you gave me."

She smiled. "When I am ready to type, I will tell you."

So I guess that is really it. I hugged Crissy later & came back to Bags End, & thens to Milne's Porch to finish this story up. It was a lot new to me, but it was all OK too.

I don't know if I understood every part of this story, I had had more questions too pretty quickly, but that's what a beagleboy journalist does. He asks questions & writes stories in English plain & true as he can. Or any language with words.

I fell asleep in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, & I felt OK about me & Crissy & Bags End & Imagianna & all.



* * * THE END * * *







***“Who Has Not at Some Time
Felt This Pendulum in His Brain?”***

—Victor Hugo, *The Man Who Laughs*

Last week I stood in line at the 7-11, so broke
I nearly bought a dollar white-cherry Slurpee
with a credit card. Sliding my Visa across the counter,
I named a pint of inexpensive vodka
to quell my embarrassment,
drown it. “So, what of tomorrow?” I ask,
sitting by a window in Calamity Cafe,
skin tight from a breeze through the door.

I listen to traffic humming loud as the blues
guitarist on stage, & I’m waiting for my bounce,
the arcing groove as pendulum reaches
counterpoint to its last extreme.

I’m drinking better vodka paid for in cash.

I’m laughing inside. I tell myself, “Riches & joy,”
despite blues riffs scattering like drizzle,
rich with gray hours, reminding me
sometimes you can’t pull out of it;
sometimes the night of your life won’t end;
sometimes at your happiest, you’re sad.

* * * * *



Diana Rosen



Mary's Story

Like a lot of older people, she seemed all legs. Her torso bent over so that, when she sat down, her head barely rose above the classroom table, and she had to pull the microphone down to under her chin to capture her voice.

And what a voice! Tinged with the Louisiana bayou where she grew up, and lived most of her life, that voice brought every word into focus. I swear I saw a sun-splattered movie as she read her story, written on a page torn from a ruled notebook, in pencil.

"Daddy asked me to deliver a pistol to his brother at his farm neighboring ours. Lucy, their shared cow was ill, he said, and Daddy said he could not do the deed himself.

"I took my time walking through the tall grasses lightened by the soft breezes and yellowed by the sun, brushing against my overalls covering the heavy weight of metal in the front pocket.

"I picked up a stick to work my way through the field, and arrived at my uncle's barn to see him sitting cross-legged on the short bale of hay, beside the cow who was emitting long low moans.

She's in a lotta pain, Mary, a lotta pain, Uncle said.

"I handed him the gun, butt end first as my Daddy had taught me, and Uncle took it with one hand, the other still on the cow's body, caressing her.

You git on home now. Git! he said, his eyes fastened on the cow.

"I backed away from him until I was out of the barn. Then, turning around, I ran for a while until I heard the shot.

"Crisp. Specific. Final.

"My childhood ended with that shot. My father, my tall, kind, strong-willed father, was no longer the saint I'd made him out to be.

"He was just a man now. A man too scared to shoot a cow."

* * * * *



Gregory Kelly

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 it is tangible the motion of lungs
 releasing air back to ancient territories
 i feel my breath circling the mysterious
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 Joe Goodden


The Beatles and LSD

[Essay]

Excerpted from "The Beatles and Drugs,"
<https://www.beatlesbible.com/features/drugs/>.

The First LSD Trip: London

While The Beatles were no strangers to drugs prior to 1965, their introduction to LSD caused a major shift in their music and personalities, as well as in the public perception of them. The event was later termed the "Dental Experience" by George Harrison, and it had a profound effect on all those present.

The precise date of this first encounter is unknown, although it's likely to have been in March or April 1965. It is known, however, that it took place at Flat 1, 2 Strathearn Place, London, in the home of 34-year-old cosmetic dentist John Riley.

Riley invited John and Cynthia Lennon, and George Harrison and Pattie Boyd to dinner. After the meal he gave them coffee laced with LSD, which at the time was little-known and still legal.

He laid it on George, me and our wives without telling us at a dinner party at his house. He was a friend of George's, and our dentist at the time. He just put it in our coffee or something. He didn't know what it was, it was just, "It's all the thing," with the middle-class London swingers. They had all heard about it and didn't know it was different from pot or pills. And they gave it to us, and he was saying, "I advise you not to leave," and we thought he was trying to keep us for an orgy in his house and we didn't want to know.

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

After the meal the five, along with Riley's 22-year-old girlfriend Cyndy Bury, adjourned from the flat's small dining room into the lounge. On the mantelpiece six sugar cubes had been carefully lined up. The cubes, each of which contained a dose of LSD, were slipped into the guests' coffees.

Riley's LSD supply had been manufactured at a farmhouse in Wales. His intention to keep his guests at the apartment backfired when they insisted on leaving for the Pickwick Club at 15-18 Great Newport Street.

Later that night we were going to a London nightclub called the Pickwick Club. It was a little restaurant with a small stage where some friends of ours were playing. Klaus Voormann, Gibson Kemp (who became Rory Storm's drummer after we stole Ringo) and a guy called Paddy. They had a little trio.

After dinner I said to John, "Let's go—they're going to be on soon," and John said "OK," but the dentist was saying, "Don't go; you should stay here." And then he said, "Well, at least finish your coffee first." So we finished our coffee and after a while I said again, "Come on, it's getting late—we'd better go." The dentist said something to John and John turned to me and said, "We've had LSD." I just thought, "Well, what's that? So what? Let's go!"

This fella was still asking us to stay and it all became a bit seedy—it felt as if he was trying to get something happening in his house; that there was some reason he didn't want us to go. In fact, he had obtained some lysergic acid diethylamide 25. It was, at the time, an unrestricted medication—I seem to recall that I'd heard vaguely about it, but I didn't really know what it was, and we didn't know we were taking it. The bloke had put it in our coffee: mine, John's, Cynthia's and Pattie's. He didn't take it. He had never had it himself. I'm sure he thought it was an aphrodisiac. I remember his girlfriend had enormous breasts and I think he thought that there was going to be a big gang-bang and that he was going to get to shag everybody. I really think that was his motive.

So the dentist said, "OK, leave your car here. I'll drive you and then you can come back later." I said, "No, no. We'll drive." And we all got in my car and he came as well, in his car. We got to the nightclub, parked and went in.

We'd just sat down and ordered our drinks when suddenly I feel the most incredible feeling come over me. It was something like a very concentrated version of the best feeling I'd ever had in my whole life.

It was fantastic. I felt in love, not with anything or anybody in particular, but with everything. Everything was perfect, in a perfect light, and I had an overwhelming desire to go round the club telling everybody how much I loved them—people I'd never seen before.

One thing led to another, then suddenly it felt as if a bomb had made a direct hit on the nightclub and the roof had been blown off: "What's going on here?" I pulled my senses together and I realised that the club had actually closed—all the people had gone, they'd put the lights on, and the waiters were going round bashing the tables and putting the chairs on top of them. We thought, "Oops, we'd better get out of here!"

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

From the Pickwick Club the party went on to the Ad Lib on 7 Leicester Place, a popular destination among London's stars. They had arranged to meet Ringo Starr there.

We went out to the Ad Lib and these discotheques and there was incredible things going on. This guy [Riley] came with us, he was nervous, he didn't know what was going on. We were going crackers. It was insane going around London on it.

When we entered the club, we thought it was on fire. And then we thought it was a premiere, but it was just an ordinary light outside. We thought, "Shit, what's going on here?" And we were cackling in the street, and then people were shouting, "Let's break a window." We were just insane. We were just out of our heads.

We finally got in the lift and we all thought there was a fire in the lift. It was just a little red light, and we were all screaming—it was hysterical. We all arrived on the floor, 'cause this was a discotheque that was up a building.

The lift stops and the door opens and we're all going "Aaahhhh" [loud scream], and we just see that it's the club, and then we walk in, sit down, and the table's elongating. I think we went to eat before that, where the table went this long, just like I'd read somebody—who is it, Blake, is it?—somebody describing the effects of the opium in the old days. And I thought, "Fuck, it's happening."

And then we went to the Ad Lib and all that. And then some singer came up to me and said, "Can I sit next to you?" And I was going, [loudly] "Only if you don't talk," 'cause I just couldn't think.

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

When the Ad Lib Club closed in the early hours of the following morning, George Harrison drove the others home in Pattie's orange Mini Cooper S, which he had given to her as a present.

It was daylight and I drove everyone home—I was driving a Mini with John and Cynthia and Pattie in it. I seem to remember we were doing 18 miles an hour and I was really concentrating—because some of the time I just felt normal and then, before I knew where I was, it was all crazy again. Anyway, we got home safe and sound, and somewhere down the line John and Cynthia got home. I went to bed and lay there for, like, three years.

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

John Lennon revealed more about the journey to George's in his 1971 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine.

George somehow or another managed to drive us home in his Mini. We were going about ten miles an hour, but it seemed like a thousand. And Pattie was saying, "Let's jump out and play football, there's these big rugby poles" and things like that. I was getting all this sort of hysterical jokes coming out, like with speed, because I was always on that, too.

George was going, "Don't make me laugh!" Oh God! It was just terrifying. But it was fantastic. I did some drawings at the time—I've got them somewhere—of four faces and "we all agree with you," things like that. I gave them to Ringo; I've lost the originals. I did a lot of drawing that night—just like that.

And then George's house seemed to be just like a big submarine. I was driving it—they all went to bed and I was carrying on on me own—it seemed to float above his wall, which was eighteen foot, and I was driving it.

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

Lennon's wife Cynthia remembered the occasion less fondly:

John and I weren't capable of getting back to Kenwood from there, so the four of us sat up for the rest of the night as the walls moved, the plants talked, other people looked like ghouls and time stood still. It was horrific: I hated the lack of control and not knowing what was going on or what would happen next.

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

George Harrison later claimed that the shared experience of LSD brought him and John Lennon closer together.

After taking acid together, John and I had a very interesting relationship. That I was younger or I was smaller was no longer any kind of embarrassment with John. Paul still says, "I suppose we looked down on George because he was younger." That is an illusion people are under. It's nothing to do with how many years old you are, or how big your body is. It's down to what your greater consciousness is and if you can live in harmony with what's going on in creation.

John and I spent a lot of time together from then on and I felt closer to him than all the others, right through until his death. As Yoko came into the picture, I lost a lot of personal contact with John; but on the odd occasion I did see him, just by the look in his eyes I felt we were connected.

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

Although Cynthia Lennon only had two subsequent experiences with LSD after the “Dental Experience,” her husband became a regular user. John Lennon’s infatuation with the drug eventually created distance between the couple.

When John was tripping I felt as if I was living with a stranger. He would be distant, so spaced-out that he couldn’t talk to me coherently. I hated that, and I hated the fact that LSD was pulling him away from me. I wouldn’t take it with him so he found others who would. Within weeks of his first trip, John was taking LSD daily and I became more and more worried. I couldn’t reach him when he was tripping, but when the effects wore off he would be normal until he took it again.

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

To Cynthia, the chemically-assisted intimacy felt false and phoney. She decided not to dabble any further, telling her husband that she wanted nothing more to do with LSD. He reluctantly accepted her decision, although it did little to temper his own use.

In addition to his emotional detachment, Lennon was often unpredictable and obnoxious to her while in his drug stupors. Cynthia decided to resume painting, which she had put on hold since their 1962 wedding, and while the Beatles were working long hours in the studio she painted an elaborate floral design on the surround of the family’s television.

The following morning I was up with Julian, about to give him his breakfast, when I glanced at my artwork. I could hardly believe what I saw. It was completely covered with circular stickers that read, “Milk Is Good For You.” John had come in during the early hours, high on drugs, and destroyed my efforts.

I was shaken and hurt. Did he not want me to have anything for myself? Was he so determined to have my total attention focused on him? Or was he simply so stoned that he hadn’t realised what he was doing?

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

The Second LSD Trip: Los Angeles

The Beatles had their second encounter with LSD on 24 August 1965. It was during an afternoon party in Los Angeles, on a break from their US tour.

On this occasion Paul McCartney declined to try LSD:

Paul felt very out of it 'cause we were all a bit cruel. It’s like, “We’re taking it and you’re not.” We couldn’t eat our food. I just couldn’t manage it. Picking it up with our hands, and there’s all these people serving us in the house, and we’re just knocking it on the floor—oh!—like that.

It was a long time before Paul took it. And then there was the big announcement. I think George was pretty heavy on it. We were probably both the most cracked. I think Paul’s a bit more stable than George and I. I don’t know about straight. Stable. I think LSD profoundly shocked him.

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

Ringo Starr, however, took his first trip in LA, as did Beatles roadie Neil Aspinall. The other key member of their entourage, Mal Evans, stayed straight to look after them all.

I'd take anything. John and George didn't give LSD to me. A couple of guys came to visit us in LA, and it was them that said, "Man, you've got to try this." They had it in a bottle with an eye-dropper, and they dropped it on sugar cubes and gave it to us.

That was my first trip. It was with John and George and Neil and Mal. Neil had to deal with Don Short while I was swimming in jelly in the pool. It was a fabulous day. The night wasn't so great, because it felt like it was never going to wear off. Twelve hours later and it was: "Give us a break now, Lord."

—Ringo Starr, 2000, *Anthology*.

Although Starr remembered visitors bringing LSD to the LA house, Harrison said the Beatles themselves had carried it from New York. The likely supplier was David Schneiderman, a twenty-two-year-old Canadian in possession of a quantity of pure Sandoz LSD. Schneiderman was temporarily living in New York's Greenwich Village; the Beatles arrived in the city on the afternoon of 13 August, remaining for four days before flying to Toronto for the next stop on their tour.

John and I had decided that Paul and Ringo had to have acid, because we couldn't relate to them any more. Not just on the one level—we couldn't relate to them on any level, because acid had changed us so much.

It was such a mammoth experience that it was unexplainable; it was something that had to be experienced, because you could spend the rest of your life trying to explain what it made you feel and think. It was all too important to John and me.

So the plan was that when we got to Hollywood, on our day off we were going to get them to take acid. We got some in New York; it was on sugar cubes wrapped in tinfoil and we'd been carrying these around all through the tour until we got to LA.

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

The guests at the LA party included Eleanor Bron, The Byrds, and journalist Don Short. Also there was actor Peter Fonda, who told the guests of accidentally shooting himself as a child while playing with a gun.

He was describing an acid trip he'd been on. We didn't want to hear about that! We were on an acid trip and the sun was shining and the girls were dancing and the whole thing was beautiful and Sixties, and this guy—who I really didn't know; he hadn't made Easy Rider or anything—kept coming over, wearing shades, saying, "I know what it's like to be dead," and we kept leaving him because he was so boring!

And I used it for the song, but I changed it to "she" instead of "he." It was scary. You know, a guy . . . when you're flying high and [whispers] "I know what it's like to be dead, man." I remembered the incident. Don't tell me about it! I don't want to know what it's like to be dead!

—John Lennon, 1980, *All We Are Saying*.

The song Lennon wrote about the encounter was "She Said She Said," from 1966's *Revolver*. With neat symmetry, it features each of the Beatles apart from McCartney.



Paul Tries It

Due to McCartney's natural reticence, it wasn't until the end of 1965 that he decided to take LSD. It was in the company of Tara Browne, a young socialite whose death in December 1966 inspired the opening lines of "A Day In The Life." McCartney's decision not to take his first trip with the other Beatles was indicative of a gap that was opening up between him and the rest of the group, which would widen further towards the end of the decade.

It took place the night after the Beatles' final British tour date. After performing in Cardiff on 12 December 1965 they were driven to London, where they celebrated the end of the tour at the Scotch of St James nightclub. The following night Lennon and McCartney returned to the club, where they met Tara Browne's wife Nicky, who invited them all back to her Eaton Row home. Lennon declined and returned to Weybridge, but McCartney and Pretty Things drummer Viv Prince accepted the offer, as did several girls, and a dancer, Patrick Kerr, from the television show *Ready Steady Go!*

At the house, Tara Browne suggested they all take LSD. McCartney and Prince were unsure, having never tried the drug.

I was more ready for the drink or a little bit of pot or something. I'd not wanted to do it, I'd held off like a lot of people were trying to, but there was massive peer pressure. And within a band, it's more than peer pressure, it's fear pressure. It becomes trebled, more than just your mates, it's, "Hey, man, this whole band's had acid, why are you holding out? What's the reason, what is it about you?" So I knew I would have to out of peer pressure alone. And that night I thought, well, this is as good a time as any, so I said, "Go on then, fine." So we all did it.

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

Nicky Browne served the guests tea, also offering them sugar lumps impregnated with liquid LSD. Unlike the "Dental Experience," however, nobody had their drinks spiked, and all stayed in the house through the night.

It was such a mind-expanding thing. I saw paisley shapes and weird things, and for a guy who wasn't that keen on getting that weird, there was a disturbing element to it. I remember looking at my shirtsleeves and seeing they were dirty and not being too pleased with that, whereas normally you wouldn't even notice. But you noticed and you heard. Everything was supersensitive.

We sat around all evening. Viv Prince was great fun. Someone said, "Do you want a drink?" And everyone would say, "No thanks, don't need drink, this is plenty." If anything, we might smoke a joint. But Viv demolished the drinks tray: "Oh yeah, a drink!" Cockney drummer with the Pretty Things. "Orrright, yeah! Nah, does anyone want a drink? I fink I'll 'ave one of them." And he had the whisky and he had everything. He was having a trip but his was somehow a more wired version than anyone else's. In the morning we ended up sending him out for ciggies.

Then one of the serious secretaries from our office rang about an engagement I had; she had traced me to here. "Um, can't talk now. Important business" or something. I just got out of it. "But you're supposed to be at the office." "No. I've got flu." Anything I could think. I got out of that one because there was no way I could go to the office after that.

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

McCartney took LSD several more times, although he didn't embrace it with the fervour of Lennon and Harrison.

I had it on a few occasions after that and I always found it amazing. Sometimes it was a very very deeply emotional experience, making you want to cry, sometimes seeing God or sensing all the majesty and emotional depth of everything. And sometimes you were just plain knackered, because it would be like sitting up all night in a train station, and by the morning you've grown very stiff and it's not a party any more. It's like the end of an all-nighter but you haven't danced. You just sat. So your bum might be sore, just from sitting. I was often quite wiped out by it all but I always thought, Well, you know, everybody's doing it.

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

Indeed, it was McCartney's lack of stamina which largely put him off LSD.

The thing I didn't like about acid was it lasted too long. It always wore me out. But they were great people to be around, a wacky crowd. My main problem was just the stamina you had to have. I never attempted to work on acid, I couldn't. What's the point of trying, love?

—Paul McCartney, 1999, *Groovy Bob*.

LSD and The Beatles' Songwriting

LSD had a profound effect on The Beatles' songwriting and recording. The first-released song to mention it was "Day Tripper," but over time its influence resulted in less explicit and more abstract references to acid.

The Beatles increasingly tapped into the burgeoning counterculture of 1966, and the first song recorded for *Revolver*, the psychedelic "Tomorrow Never Knows," featured lyrics adapted from Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert's 1964 book *The Psychedelic Experience* (itself a modern reworking of the ancient *Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

Paul McCartney believed it to be their only recording about the LSD experience. Speaking to *Playboy* in 1984, he said: "It was a kind of Bible for all the psychedelic freaks. That was an LSD song. Probably the only one."

The song perhaps most often associated with The Beatles' use of LSD, however, is Lennon's "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds." While the group always denied that the title was a reference to acid—Lennon and McCartney both maintained it was inspired by a painting drawn by Julian Lennon and named after a school friend—there is little doubt that the *Through The Looking Glass* imagery was the product of drug intake.

Lennon only took LSD once in the studio, unwittingly, on 21 March 1967 during a recording session for the *Sgt Pepper* song "Getting Better."

I thought I was taking some uppers, and I was not in a state of handling it. I can't remember what album it was but I took it and then [whispers] I just noticed all of a sudden I got so scared on the mike. I said, "What was it?" I thought I felt ill. I thought I was going cracked. Then I said, "I must get some air."

They all took me upstairs on the roof, and George Martin was looking at me funny. And then it dawned on me. I must have taken acid. And I said, "Well, I can't go on, I have to go." So I just said, "You'll have to do it and I'll just stay and watch."

I just [became] very nervous and just watching all of a sudden. "Is it alright?" and they were saying, "Yeah." They were all being very kind. They said, "Yes, it's alright." And I said, "Are you sure it's alright?" They carried on making the record.

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

In fact, the session was stopped once The Beatles realised that Lennon was tripping. Lennon's car was not at the studio, and so McCartney took him to his nearby home at Cavendish Avenue. This became the first occasion on which Lennon and McCartney took LSD together, with the trusty Mal Evans looking after them.

I thought, "Maybe this is the moment where I should take a trip with him. It's been coming for a long time. It's often the best way, without thinking about it too much, just slip into it. John's on it already, so I'll sort of catch up." It was my first trip with John, or with any of the guys. We stayed up all night, sat around and hallucinated a lot.

Me and John, we'd known each other for a long time. Along with George and Ringo, we were best mates. And we looked into each other's eyes, the eye contact thing we used to do, which is fairly mind-boggling. You dissolve into each other. But that's what we did, round about that time, that's what we did a lot. And it was amazing. You're looking into each other's eyes and you would want to look away, but you wouldn't, and you could see yourself in the other person. It was a very freaky experience and I was totally blown away.

There's something disturbing about it. You ask yourself, "How do you come back from it? How do you then lead a normal life after that?" And the answer is, you don't. After that you've got to get trepanned or you've got to meditate for the rest of your life. You've got to make a decision which way you're going to go.

I would walk out into the garden—"Oh no, I've got to go back in." It was very tiring, walking made me very tired, wasted me, always wasted me. But "I've got to do it, for my well-being." In the meantime John had been sitting around very enigmatically and I had a big vision of him as a king, the absolute Emperor of Eternity. It was a good trip. It was great but I wanted to go to bed after a while.

I'd just had enough after about four or five hours. John was quite amazed that it had struck me in that way. John said, "Go to bed? You won't sleep!" "I know that, I've still got to go to bed." I thought, now that's enough fun and partying, now . . .

It's like with drink. That's enough. That was a lot of fun, now I gotta go and sleep this off. But of course you don't just sleep off an acid trip so I went to bed and hallucinated a lot in bed. I remember Mal coming up and checking that I was all right. "Yeah, I think so." I mean, I could feel every inch of the house, and John seemed like some sort of emperor in control of it all. It was quite strange. Of course he was just sitting there, very inscrutably.

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*

Turning Point

On 17 June 1967 *Life* magazine published an interview with Paul McCartney in which he admitted having taken LSD. Two days later, following intense press attention, he gave an interview to Independent Television News in which he discussed his use of the drug and the media reaction.

I remember a couple of men from ITN showed up, and then the newscaster arrived: "Is it true you've had drugs?" They were at my door—I couldn't tell them to go away—so I thought, "Well, I'm either going to try to bluff this, or I'm going to tell him the truth." I made a lightning decision: "Sod it. I'll give them the truth."

I spoke to the reporter beforehand, and said, "You know what's going to happen here: I'm going to get the blame for telling everyone I take drugs. But you're the people who are going to distribute the news. I'll tell you. But if you've got any worries about the news having an effect on kids, then don't show it. I'll tell you the truth, but if you disseminate the whole thing to the public then it won't be my responsibility. I'm not sure I want to preach this but, seeing as you're asking—yeah, I've taken LSD.' I'd had it about four times at the stage, and I told him so. I felt it was reasonable, but it became a big news item.

—Paul McCartney, 2000, *Anthology*.

The Beatles' use of LSD decreased after the 1967 Summer of Love. For George Harrison, the turning point came during a trip to San Francisco's hippie district Haight-Ashbury on 7 August 1967. They walked around the area while tripping on LSD, but became increasingly uncomfortable as they became surrounded.

I could see all the spotty youths, but I was seeing them from a twisted angle. It was like the manifestation of a scene from an Hieronymus Bosch painting, getting bigger and bigger, fish with heads, faces like vacuum cleaners coming out of shop doorways . . .

They were handing me things—like a big Indian pipe with feathers on it, and books and incense—and trying to give me drugs. I remember saying to one guy: "No thanks, I don't want it." And then I heard his whining voice saying, "Hey, man—you put me down." It was terrible.

We walked quicker and quicker through the park and in the end we jumped in the limo, said, "Let's get out of here," and drove back to the airport.

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

The crowd began to grow hostile as they returned to the limousine, and those outside began rocking the vehicle as their faces pressed against the windows. The narrow escape increased Harrison's resolve to move away from LSD.

That was the turning point for me—that's when I went right off the whole drug cult and stopped taking the dreaded lysergic acid. I had some in a little bottle—it was liquid. I put it under a microscope, and it looked like bits of old rope. I thought that I couldn't put that into my brain any more.

People were making concoctions that were really wicked—ten times stronger than LSD. STP was one; it took its name from the fuel additive used in Indy-car racing. Mama Cass Elliot phoned us up and said, "Watch out, there's this new one going round called STP." I never took it. They concocted weird mixtures and the people in Haight-Ashbury got really fucked-up. It made me realise: "This is not it." And that's when I really went for the meditation.

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

On 26 August 1967 The Beatles publicly renounced the use of drugs, pledging their belief in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's system of Transcendental Meditation instead.

Although their attempts at sobriety were short-lived, among John Lennon's reasons for his declining use of LSD was the number of bad trips he experienced, along with a gradual diminishing of his ego.

I had many. Jesus Christ. I stopped taking it 'cause of that. I mean I just couldn't stand it. I dropped it for I don't know how long. Then I started taking it just before I met Yoko. I got a message on acid that you should destroy your ego, and I did. I was reading that stupid book of Leary's and all that shit.

We were going through a whole game that everybody went through. And I destroyed meself. I was slowly putting meself together after Maharishi, bit by bit, over a two-year period. And then I destroyed me ego and I didn't believe I could do anything. I let Paul do what he wanted and say, them all just do what they wanted. And I just was nothing, I was shit.

And then Derek [Taylor] tripped me out at his house after he'd got back from LA. He said, "You're alright." And he pointed out which songs I'd written, and said, "You wrote this, and you said this, and you are intelligent, don't be frightened."

The next week I went down with Yoko and we tripped out again, and she freed me completely, to realise that I was me and it's alright. And that was it. I started fighting again and being a loud-mouth again and saying, "Well, I can do this," and "Fuck you, and this is what I want," and "Don't put me down. I did this."

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

By the time of his death in 1980 Lennon had stopped taking LSD, but nonetheless defended it against common public perception of its effects.

A little mushroom or peyote is not beyond my scope, you know, maybe twice a year or something. But acid is a chemical. People are taking it, though, even though you don't hear about it anymore. But people are still visiting the cosmos. It's just that nobody talks about it; you get sent to prison . . .

I've never met anybody who's had a flashback. I've never had a flashback in my life and I took millions of trips in the Sixties, and I've never met anybody who had any problem. I've had bad trips and other people have had bad trips, but I've had a bad trip in real life. I've had a bad trip on a joint. I can get paranoid just sitting in a restaurant. I don't have to take anything.

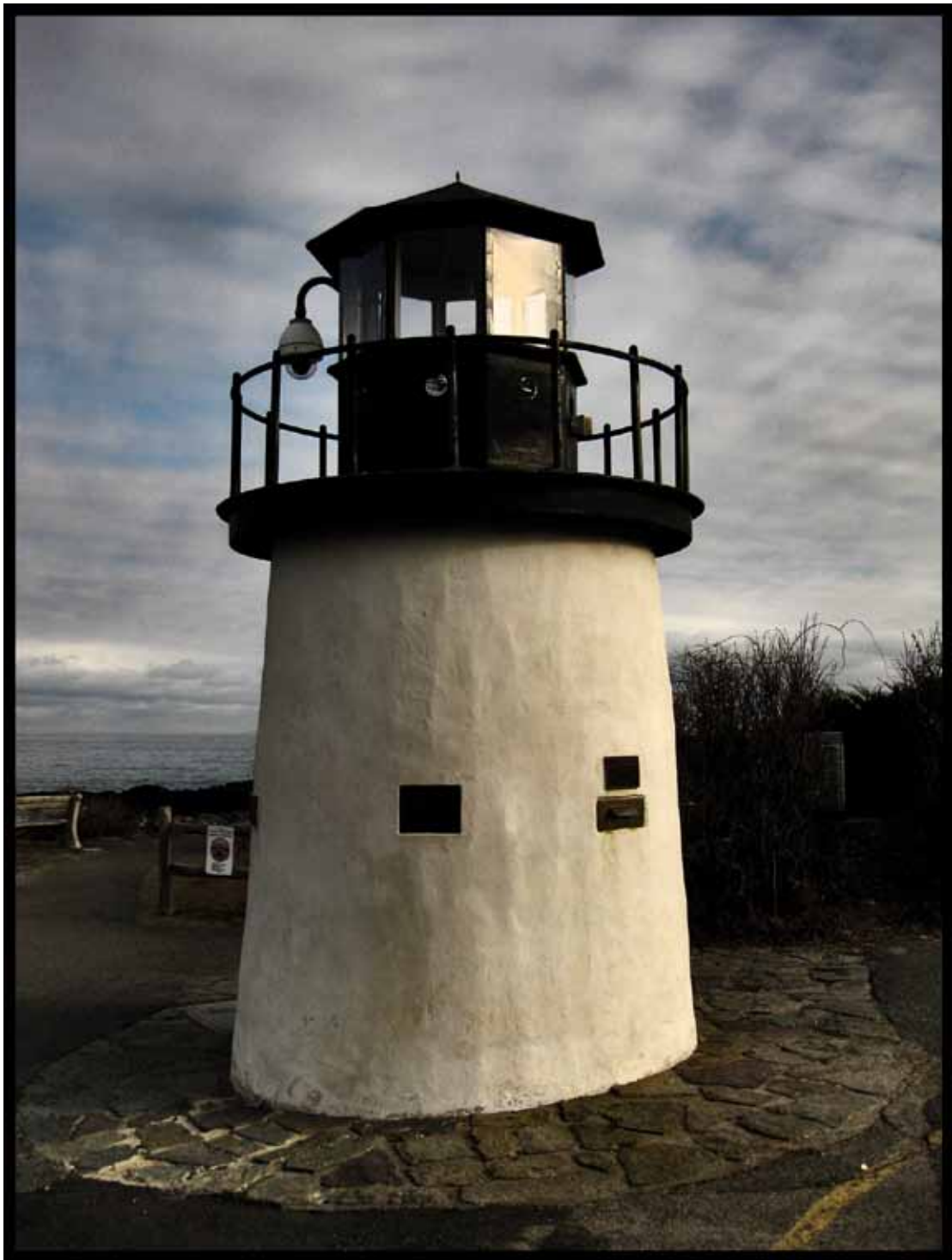
Acid is only real life in Cinemascope. Whatever experience you had is what you would have had anyway. I'm not promoting, all you committees out there, and I don't use it because it's chemical, but all the garbage about what it did to people is garbage.

—John Lennon, 1980, *All We Are Saying*.

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* * * * *



Tom Sheehan**A Recall for Seamus Heaney**

I name myself
walking through the house
before I get there.

On birch floors my shoes
sound dull as wood pulses
an ancient drummer

marked time with.
These dead trees are full
of sassy talk.

A strata of air,
corporeally chilled, moves
a cubit wide in the kitchen,

a polar exercise
taking place.
I have been

other places before,
before I got there:
banging a curragh

against the Atlantic
the long watch
of a day,

wind full of slam
and salt and voice
of the seal;

blackening spuds
in a field fire,
chatting rain alive

on slow coals of sticks
like hiccups, hawthorns
for roofing and stone

markers for walls;
pressed foul as fish
in subterranean passage

with the metallic Atlantic
telling me all its
old stories,

icebergs and whales
and the loan sharks
waiting in the new land;

scavenging a city dump
for furniture, books
and bedding,

waging private wars
against prejudice, hunger,
Roscommon calling me home;

this kitchen, now,
dark-cornered, remote, out
of which I walk toward myself.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

"Is that him?" Troy asks his friend Abraham.

The ancient Sea Turtle's old crinkled piercing green eyes study his slender friend with wordless deep affection.

"Yes. It is."

"He'll take me with him? Like you said?"

"Yes. He will."

"I'm going to help him & then return here to you?" Troy's face is loving, terrified, eager.

"Yes, son."

cxxv.

"Isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to each other?" this I read written on the blank back page of the coverless copy of *Nazi Jailbait Bitch* someone has left on the small table next to my hospital bed.

The ink is black, a medium point pen, the letters cursive but idiosyncratic, it's all faded like written here a long long time ago.

I page through the book idly, looking for more notes of this kind. Find a folded sheet splashed half-gone but the words "wars of the future" & "who am I, Turquoise Eyes?"

Look around to see what this room is. There's a window curtained, the curtain's designs seem to be from a really old book, faintly colored sketches of a White Bunny, a grey hedgedyhog, a purple furry dancing Creature with ribbons & bows—

Breathe. Relax. I have forgotten myself before, this my one certainty. It'll come back slowly, though I



can trigger it. My memories return faster if I can figure out how.

I pick up *NJB* again & page through more slowly, letting something come to me, willing a bit the trigger—

Nothing. Just words. Stand again, in my long green & gold gown, barefoot. There is a small mirror next to the door, step over to look.

I look ragged & weary, the gown on me clean but laundered in coarse water many, many times. My eyes are bright & tired both. My beard is trimmed; my hair too, mid-length. Like someone recently gave me some slow careful attention.

Then something in the mirror catches my eye. There's on the unmade bed another book, coverless, about the size of the *NJB* still in my hand, but this one is glowing, is *hmmming*, & what is this then? It has a kind of extra-dimensionality to it, but when I turn to look it straight on, it's not there, & the copy in my hand isn't glowing. I look back in the mirror & there it is, on unmade bed, glowing deeply—

I pull the mirror with some difficulty off the wall, pieces of plaster coming along too—

Back step by step toward the glowing book on the unmade bed, & it remains in view—

Without turning I watch my hand groping to touch this book, have to hold mirror up high to see—

It feels like warm water to my fingers, & its *hmmming* rides through my bare touch to every part of me, not hurting, triggering, *oh* yes—

Reach deeper in, now up to my elbow deep in this glowing, *hmmming* thing, remembering but not quite, more & more, but still not quite, like I've not reached deep enough, not yet touched something crucial—

How deep can a man enter into a glowing hmmming paperback book? Is it growing bigger for me, or am I shrinking for it?

There is a welcome in this, a beautiful return, & yet, & yet—

I remember now. Oh.

cxxvi.

It's a clear moment. This empty movie-house again & I'm sure it's long after midnight & I wonder why ***RemoteLand*** isn't showing as it does. The screen is blank. I wait.

Others are waiting too, I notice as I turn to look back at the rest from my second row seat. Always sit up front close, there are hidden things the closer you are.

I tried the first row one time, 10 hits of acid, & it seemed like I could climb on in if I wanted, the screen glowed deeper & deeper & I clutched my seat & tried to climb in both—

but something pushed me back, softly but firmly, awled “no” or “not yet” on my forehead but I could

not see it myself, not even in the mirror, just feel the ridges of letters with my left thumb only & never sure of it, never sure—

second row, though, was good, & I could loiter at the edges of the entrance, sometimes get a peek inside, those Imps who cackle quietly & poke curiously just below the screen, I offer my hand & they will once awhile gnaw lazily & friendly—

Back there—that's Nazi Jailbait Bitch, what she told me she's called anyway, we don't talk much anymore but I still taste her too-soft skin, my fingers inside her school uniform, her white panties, her black bra, & somewhere else too, *where? what?* she shoved me away with a big man's brutish strength, not a slight girl's demur—

Those three in the last row, who are they? Not much older than NJB, they don't notice me looking back, the film or something absorbs them—

Sighing, I turn back to the screen & ready my little notepad & pencil to catch what I can—

I know the screen isn't blank. It's punishing me for my distractions, wanting to hold a girl's hand, to taste her youth, wanting anything but what's on that screen—

I watch, let the multi-dimensions of Imaginal Space burble out to me, on all sides, let it take me, this hospital bed soft & my blankets warm, & I see the Imps now on a kind of temporal wire that reaches from my left thumb to the Moon, & I begin to climb & climb & climb, & Imps along the way help me too, *ulp!* & spit me on, *ulp!* & spit, *ulp!* & spit—till I arrive—

Soft voices. Girlish hands softly on me.

“You'll take us in with you.”

“And we'll find our way down to the Great Tree.”

“Down among its roots.”

“Do you like that?”

“And this?”

Giggles. Moans.

I can't see but feel myself gently helped up, carried along until a seat again, smells of bloom & the Sea all around me, *it's the first row. I can't!*

I can. I will. I don't open my eyes, if they are closed, but I begin to direct them how I will, *what I want*, what the cost of my power is, how I will bring you to him & keep you too—

Fuck you, NJB.

[Amused, she follows.]

[[The way on is sometimes through the way back to something new to be found back then to affect hereon.

[[“We are what we were
 but
not what we shall become!”
 cryeth blue-eyed mystic
 guitarist Jim Reality III
 smiling tricky for
 all to hear

[[I’m working with these ideas
 without a real process
 or plan
 Wilder Wilder Sea past
 midnight out this
 hotel picture window]]

Next to the big screen there is a ladder that climbs up & up & up into unseeable heights. I know about it from that occasional scene in **RemoteLand** where the camera seems to be showing a live scene among the present audience members, & then ascends on the ladder up & up & *how is this going to bring us to the Great Tree?* they will ask? Well my sweeties getting to the heart of the world is not done in linear fashion by peoplefolks without help, & upppnupppnupp! this ladder we will come to help to bring us there it’s why you came to me isn’t it? looking for someone you learned about me, my talents to search & guide my talents which I learned from this not film &

Oh

NJB is following us. I look down the ladder which twists & turns so that I am able to see three sets of pretty eyes in the clothes they agreed to wear for me & a fourth who is following after them

It will be awhile climbing up this ladder, there are reststops on the way, they curl into me soft warm & willing to make me feel nice with their soft touches & *hmmms*

She just hangs on the ladder & waits like a spider in pause if spiders dressed in white tights & short skirts, waits for us to resume—

The not-film didn’t show what the ladder led to save that images of trees subtextualized more & more through, till it was more climbing branches than ladder steps—

Getting there, the air is closer & sweeter & gentler—

I wonder who he is these magic nymphs seek—

There is a moment to tell that is stranger & finer than all else yet—I find myself climbing into a cloud, find that for some time I am ascending & do not feel the steps of the ladder, do not feel most dark things I usually do—fear—stress—eth thetera—

I look around this kind of place I am ascending through & could swear it is a kind of library, or at least there seem to be countless bookcases of great & little sizes in the murky distance—

nearer about me are—*words? pages? floating about me in this cloud?* singing or at least *hmmming* to me?



I close my eyes.
 I smile & let go.
 I don't know why I do this.

I am upheld, whatever
 I am this is you are
 I am upheld & feel myself
 disintegrate from what I
 am to what this is, add
 me to it, it become of
 me too—

No time. No space. No worry.

I am whatever I am floating
 like a colorful ribbon of me
 through all this & part of
 it & there are small hands
 about me now, touching very
 gently

they are furred
 they are tending me
 removing cold sharp
 things from my mind
 if I am mind still now —

precise work, gentle work
 patient work, bit by bit

then letting me go on
 I am again do not want to
 letting me go on
 do not want to
 I am again
 go on

& up now & up now

“How did you become Nazi Jailbait Bitch?”

“Like a job interview?”

“Maybe?”

“Like am I not the first to play this role?”

“Um?”

“Like the rules are very strict about who & what one must be?”

“Rules?”

“Like the term is limited & once over, it's over?”

I nod. Shake my head.

Suddenly, she laughs. A mocking but pretty laugh. Bats her lashes at me, I'm not kidding.

Reaches out for my hand as our climb up to go down has nearly finished & we are near to the Great Tree & its roots, & maybe Global Wall so sought.

The other girls sleeping at a resting place. NJB & I a few steps up higher on ladder.

“So we drop them off & go?”

“Go?”

“I’m not here to find him.”

“Why are you here?”

“I dunno. Curiosity? My book life was pretty limited. Violent sex & murder.”

“Did you emerge from the book or was it based on you?”

She laughs again. I’ve begun to notice her accent, an English one. I suppose, given the destruction Nazis rained on England, a revenge murderess would not be unexpected.

“When was your book published?”

“Has it been?”

“Well, as a cheap little paperback. The kind they used to sell in bus stations.”

“Oh.”

“So maybe a kind of underground paperback, not long after World War II & the advent of the cheaply & mass produced paperback? Maybe yours kept under the counter in newsstands? Had to know a guy.”

“Or a password!” says April, now all of us together. Them awake & come.

NJB laughs. Her uniform is black vest & white shirt, plaid skirt, black tights & shoes.

“All white under,” she smirks to my unasked question. Lies.

They all laugh. “He loves white,” they agree, “although black” one adds “& red!” another shrieks “& pink!” now they are falling over themselves.

I try to remember: Global has come down here to find his deeper, truer self, the one he lost when his dreams ended, when pretty girl smiles both consumed & flayed him with rejection—

What am I doing leading these pretty girl smiles to him? Of course, they came later, & not a speck of rejection in them.

Still, he needs time & they need to understand better.

I motion us climb quickly to next reststop. Sit in circle. *All* of us.

“I need to share with you more of what Global Wall is so that you can all love him better.”

They nod, their pretty faces now serious.

“Then I’ll lead you close as I can.”

Nod.

“Then Ariel & I will move on to other travels.”

“Ariel?” they all ask.

I nod at NJB. She smiles sincerely, which is far better than her come-on NJB one.

[There is a still movement coming when all will stand hands & paws clasped ring round the Hut which is conduit to then, the undifferentiated time, no wake/sleep dichotomy, each touches all, we are all the

hmmm, & this moment is arriving to these pages soon—

[This occurring down deeper than the roots of the Great Tree at the heart of the world—where many seek answer to “Why is there something instead of nothing?”

[And nearby, tho not really a tangible distance measureable in these ancient places near the Hut, there is the World’s Woods, where things are less certain, like where the White or One Woods begins, or maybe dissipates—

[And all this to say that it’s been nearly two months since last lines of this book, & much is waiting to continue along—here this Mac-Donald’s again—no Halloween decorations this time—closing the lobby I sit in shortly for night at midnight—drive-through goes on till 3 a.m.—

[All this to say: resume, a big breath & resume. *Back to fucking work.*]

xxxvii.

I lead Rey & Figga, & Pirth in my plaid green jacket pocket, to my Hut in the White Woods. Pass my Burning Man 2003 pendant across the crazy smiling imp plaque on its door, a merry cackle replies as we enter.

I sit in my comfy green armchair & Rey & Figga curl together in the just as comfy armchair across from me.

I pop Pirth out of my pocket to dance where he wills. He ranges lightly from atop the filing cabinet next to my chair; to the little bookcase against the wall to the right of the door, same wall with the many fine Creature portraits, me lucky to be in some of them; & finally to the arm of Rey & Figga’s armchair, lingering there as much as he lingers anywhere.

I look at pretty Figga. “Do you remember a space hero named Mulronie the Space Pirate?”

Her pretty turquoise eyes listen, ponder, reach deep in, almost find something, then don’t. Shakes her head.

“He loved a girl named Figga, but his heroic space adventures took him far from her.”

She listens but still nearly nothing.

“So you are somehow her, or formerly her somehow, or something else maybe.”

They are transfixed on my struggling words, which I wish were better.

I think. “Maybe there are answers in the Place of Art.” I look at Figga & Rey both. “Maybe for both of you.”

They nod, vague smiles. Waiting.

I stand & push aside my armchair to reveal the trap door below. Pull it back & there is the Column down into the earth. “Pirth & I have traveled this before but this time the four of us will go to a



different place.”

As though summoned, Pirth dances up to me & I hold out my green plaid jacket pocket for him to tuck into. Manages three pats of three noses along his way.

Smiling kind & sweet at them, I start to descend the winding stairs down. They are some kind of warm, ancient wood, *humming* & glowing for reassurance & light. There is a rail too, one I don't recall coming up. Is it because we are descending? Effect & cause? Because descending, thus a rail? I wonder this as I listen to them follow behind me, single file, & then I think something else.

Our traveling party needs an additional person. We will find her in a little while, further below. Effect & thus cause. She will help.

She's waiting on a kind of landing we arrive to. She's studying the walls around her, making notations & sketches in her artpad. Smiles when she sees me.

“I wondered where you'd gotten to.”

I kiss Beckah warmly & then show her to Figga & Rey.

“This is my *Labyrinthine* wife, Rebecca. Beckah, this is Figga & Rey.”

Her smile golden warms them.

I am less a friendly stranger now, more like them.

Pirth dances up to Bekah, onto her outstretched hands, & then sort of tugs her back to the pictures & symbols she'd been studying & sketching on the landing's wall. A particular one. We cluster up to take a look. Pirth's glowing purple fur helps.

This etching is ancient but I think Rey & I figure it out same time.

“The spaceship in the earth.”

Beckah regards closely the small purple furry Creature in her paws. “You think we should go there?”

He studies her blue eyes with his deep black ones. Reaches forward to pat her nose.

They look at me & I nod to Pirth to lead us now. “But slowly, please,” I say politely.

Hops off Bekah's hands & over to where the stairs downward resume. I nod Figga & Rey to follow him, & then I follow Bekah.

“While I was waiting for you, I caught up on the story.”

I see no fat notebooks in her possession. Her artbag does not bulge as it would. “How?”

She pats that artbag, though. “Some call it tricky smile magic.”

I laugh.

The winding way is steady. Figga & Rey are not talking but OK, just concentrating.

“Are you still happy with this book?”

I stop climbing down & Pirth's sharp ears cause him & the others to do so too. I think Figga & Rey heard Bekah's question & so all cluster back to us to listen.

"It matters deep in my heart, where the air is calm & the light is clear. Sometimes I lose my way down there, like I fall off the path into murk. But I never doubt it's there somewhere to find again. The way is always there."

Blue eyes listening so close, I forget we are speaker & listener.

"Yes. I'm still happy with this book. I'm just not always happy with me."

She nods. I motion us all to get along, & I see Pirth's purple furry glow continuing along our way.

I sense it won't be long now.
And it isn't. We come to a door.
A numbered keypad beside it.

Rey looks at me quizzically. I nod. I punch *one, none, many* into the pad & there is a deep exhalation of air, like a long-overdue breath, & the door ajar. I push it in, & step through. Not unlike the hallway Rey & I traveled.

Pirth back in my pocket, Rey & I take the point side by side. To calm any jitters, I take her hand & Rebecca behind us takes Figga's.

I speak what little I know. "We're guessing that intent counts, that these disparate places can & are handing us one to the next. And what we're looking to learn is along our coming path."

I think. Want to say more then don't. Almost sigh.

"Let's just stay close."

Rey is quiet, studying the blank walls of the six-foot wide corridor we are in.

"Are you remembering?" I ask.
She's quiet a long time. Then:
"You travel by who you are, who you're with, what you seek. Kind of like you said."
"Are we clear & focused enough?" I wonder.
"I think so," she says slowly, now studying Pirth in my pocket.
"Should he lead?" I ask.
She nods. "Maybe just a feeling? Or a guess?"
So I take Pirth out & hold him in my hands facing us, all paused, clustered up.

"We want to go to the Place of Art. It is a place of origins, of making. Some of it unsure," I say. Pirth rarely speaks in English, preferring nose-pattings & dancing. But he is a Creature & there are many ways of understanding.

Reaches forward & we adjust in our crowdings so every nose gets a pat. Then he hops to the floor & slow dances our way.

I nod at Rey as we resume. "Good guess."

It's not long again before something up ahead feels different. The air cools, ripples. Pirth dances us right

into a great sparkling limestone cavern. I look back & see the spaceship hallway fading as though no longer needed right now, or never really there?

They wander around for a bit but I am heading to the far end. To the hole in that wall over there. Made accidentally by the great tail of Calgary the Sea Dragon.

The others join me after grooving on the sparkling stones & boulders awhile. Figga shows me four small stones she collected. One for each of us. I nod. I guess.

The hole is dark & I help each girl step into it. Pirth hops in. I go last.

I know what's there in the dark nearby & lift up Pirth like a flashlight to reveal.

It is an old-time motion picture camera.

"RemoteLand?" I say aloud, just a musing.

Rebecca studies it closely, taller than her, a deep vaguely shiny black. A long crank on one side. A panel of buttons on the other. Its tripod base legs are thick, very sturdy.

"No dust," she replies.

"No answers yet," I say.

We turn away & use Pirth in my leading hand to guide us through otherwise near darkness.

I start to *hmmm* our way along & the others join in. This lightens our way a little.

We're getting there. Effect & cause. And the mystery of what next.



To be continued in Cenacle | 108 | June 2019

* * * * *



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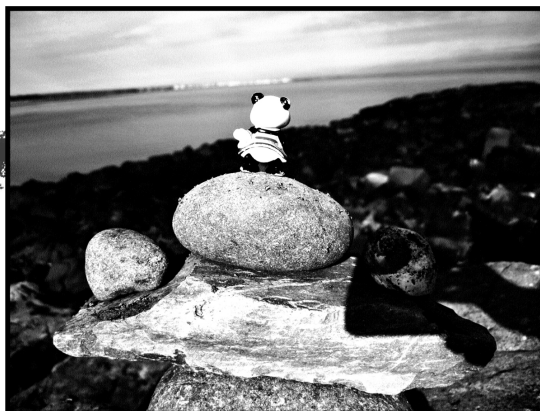
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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. He recently wrote me that he is “taking off with my cousin to the Deep South. This should be interesting.” Safe travels, brother! More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. To my request for poems for this issue, he replied: “Is it that time already? Yikes.” You keep writing your fine poems, Ace, I’ll keep coming for ’em! His most recent book of poetry is *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, published by Unsolicited Press in 2018.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His “Easter” poem in this issue rightly wowed the other contributors who got an advanced look at it. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html>.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Leia Friedman is a writer, clinician, & professor living in Sherman, Connecticut. Her writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 104 | June 2018. She was quite busy doing advocacy & activism this past winter, so it’s an especial pleasure to be publishing her new travel journal in this issue.

Joe Goodden lives in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom. He is founder of the wonderful *Beatles Bible* website, located at <https://www.beatlesbible.com>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Trying to stay as unattached from the recent depressing Israeli legislative election as possible. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His poetry in this issue is from his new book, *Many Worlds: A Collection of Poems*, published by Modern Memoirs in March 2019. Wonderful news that your health is on the mend after a long struggle! Bravo, Jimmy!

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Gateway Mexico: Adventures of another gringo who wanted to be a shaman (Nighttime Daydreams Book 1)* in 2018. It can be found online at: https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07KY37T7C/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_tkin_p1_i0. Wishing you every good fortune in finding the job that fits, Nate!

Langston Hughes was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, & died in New York City in 1967. He is rightly considered one of the 20th century's greatest poets. Scriptor Press published a volume of his poetry called *Dig and Be Dug In Return: Selected Poems* as part of the 2002 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He is fascinated by "little chats" with his new grandson. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. On his bicycle one day recently, Gregory smacked into a car, flung into trees. He's OK. Cars always win, Greg!

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent monthly poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). She is soon off to read her poetry at the 2019 Bucks Mill Poetry Festival, in Devon, England. Reading from her new event chapbook called *Earth Gospel*, published by Scriptor Press in April 2019.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her unique life education has led to poems finer than many of the most formally accredited. Her recent book of poetry, *Never Completely Awake*, was published by Deer Brook Editions in 2017. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

Diana Rosen lives in Los Angeles, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 106 | December 2018. More prose-poetry this time around. Some nice experiments!

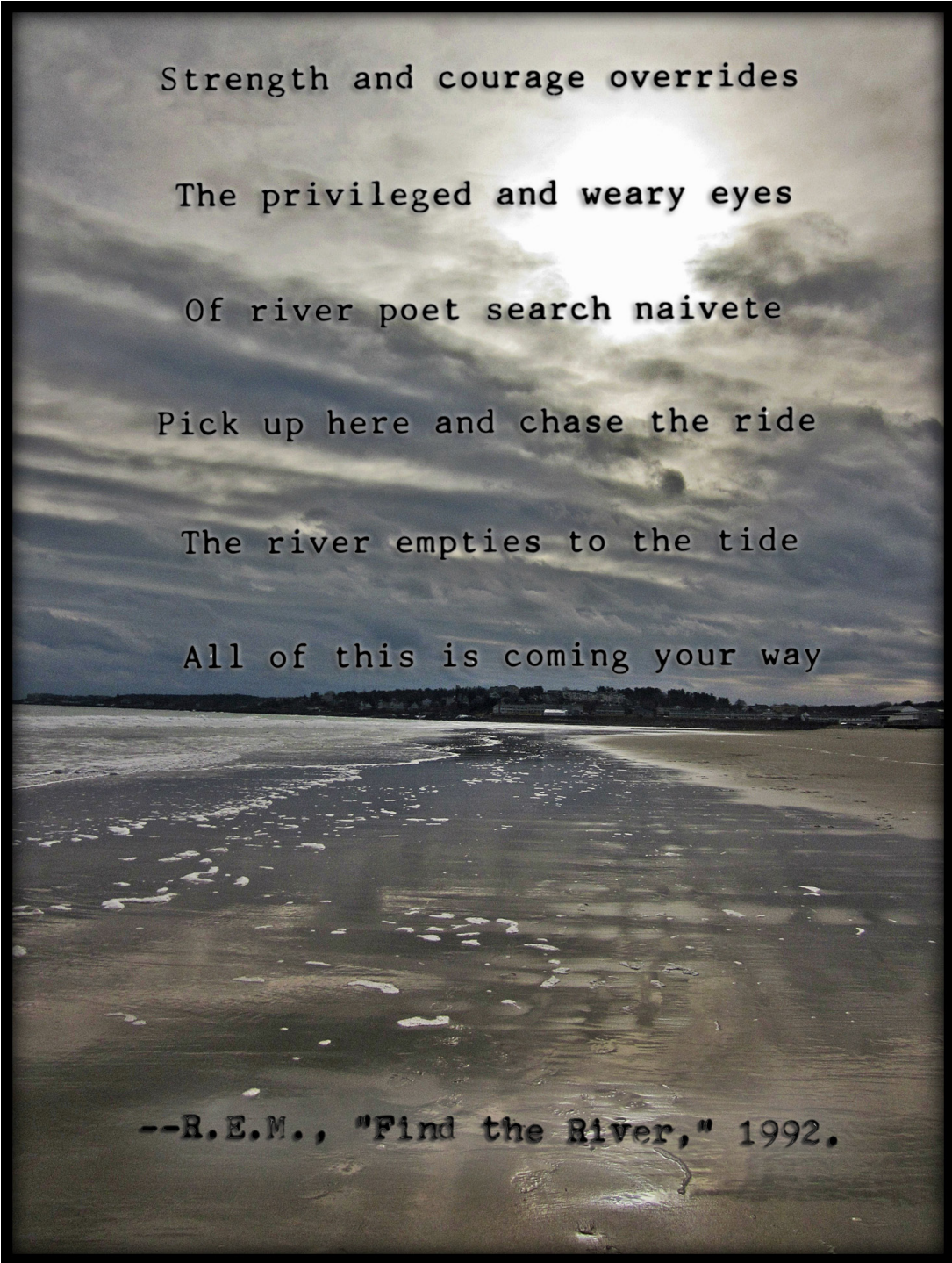
Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Gets up to start his writing day at 2 in the morning. What a warrior! His newest book of poetry is called *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, published by Pocol Press in March 2019.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Her mind & her body & her soul taste like the sweetest candy in the world to me.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. 24 years of this periodical. Hard fucking work, & an ongoing dream come true, both.

* * * * *





Strength and courage overrides

The privileged and weary eyes

Of river poet search naivete

Pick up here and chase the ride

The river empties to the tide

All of this is coming your way

--R.E.M., "Find the River," 1992.

